

# **Cultural Retrieval as a Dramatic Strategy: A Study of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*, *Tale- Danda* and *Bali-The Sacrifice***

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**under the supervision of**

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# *Certificate*

This dissertation titled **Cultural Retrieval as a Dramatic Strategy: A Study of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda* and *Bali-The Sacrifice*** submitted by **Mudasir Ahmad Shah** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy (**M Phil**) in **English**, is an independent and original piece of research work carried out under my supervision. This research work has not been submitted, in part or in full, to any University/Institute for any degree. The candidate has fulfilled all the statutory requirements for the submission of this dissertation.

**Professor Mohammad Aslam**  
**Supervisor**

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## **Introduction**

The Indian English literature has developed as an important, vibrant and versatile body of writing and has drawn attention of the global audiences. It has made a substantial progress by encapsulating various issues that India has been facing from time to time. It has grappled with the onslaughts of colonialism, globalization, and Indian socio-political and cultural issues. It drew its impetus from Indian sensibility, philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, myths and religious beliefs and attracted attention of the people across the boundaries.

When one goes through the history of Indian English literature, one comes to know that the Indian English Drama (hereafter, IED) has made a little progress than the Indian English Novel and Poetry. Diachronically speaking, the IED made its debut before the rest of the two aforementioned genres but failed to keep pace with them because of some reasons which will be discussed in detail in Chapter III. Unlike Novel and Poetry, Drama cannot be restricted to reading only. It is a genre which needs a theatre for its enactment. This lack of theatricality in India has proved detrimental for the IED as well as dramatists. The second problem that this genre faced was that of the English language. English being a foreign language did not cater to the needs of Indian people who knew very little of the language. The dialogues in English from Indian characters seemed unconvincing because they lacked in Indian flavour,

temperament and sensibility. Despite this failure of Indian English, the IED has attracted the attention of various writers who contributed a lot to this genre and infused life in it. Contemporary Playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Mohan Rakesh and Girish Karnad have done a commendable job in this field and it is worthwhile to explore its various dimensions and features.

Girish Karnad (b. 1938) is a versatile writer who has not only contributed a lot to the IED but has also shown his ability as an actor, director, poet, script writer and translator. He belongs to the formative generation of Indian playwrights who came to maturity in the two decades following Independence and collectively reshaped the Indian theatre as a major national institution in the latter part of the twentieth century. He is a recipient of various awards and honours including Padma Bhushan (1992) and Bharatiya Jnanpith Award (1999). He began to frame his repertoire when there was a direct clash “between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions and finally between the various visions of future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved” (Karnad 1999: 21). Karnad is a bilingual writer who first writes his plays in Kannad and then translates them into English for international publicity. As a post-colonial writer, Karnad’s plays are rich and vibrant in Indian sensibility, characterization and

themes. Indian myths, legends, folk tales and Indian folk theatre traditions which reflect the social and cultural ethos of India need an immediate attention as indigenous cultures are near extinction because of foreign cultural invasions. This return to roots and the preference or revival of local culture and tradition is an important aspect of the decolonization process of all post-colonial societies and Karnad also does the same. He provides a perfect paradigm in his plays that deals with the issues of cultural identity, nationhood, gender discrimination and anti-colonial resistance. As an icon in IED, Karnad is not content with the depiction of urban realism common in Indian theatre. His themes move beyond representational realism.

As a dramatist equipped with a strongly felt historical vision, Karnad roots his dramas in ancient Indian legends, myths, folktales, history and contemporary reality. While reworking with them, he makes them almost alive and true. His plays have Indian settings and the thematic values of his plays are based on Indian philosophy, sociology, religious beliefs, psychology, historical development, myths, legends and folktales. He combines the worlds of reality, fantasy and universality of human knowledge in his presentation of Indian tradition and culture. Karnad has the association of sensibility with the indispensable past, immediate present and impending future.

The aim of this study is to explore how Karnad re-contextualizes his ideal narratives from Indian myths and history, and makes current the neglected cultural past of India in *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda* and *Bali-The Sacrifice*. The study aims to explore *Tughlaq* as an exercise in historical revisionism, since no 'official' historiography is accepted. Karnad blends fact and fiction to renew the literary history in order to remove the prejudices of historical objectivity. Karnad has made an attempt to introduce history into drama to subvert the received historical facts. He rewrites them from a perspective different from the accepted interpretations. This questioning of historical facts enables him to highlight the other versions of history which otherwise remain far away from human eye. From post-colonial perspective, the study analyses this text as an exercise which not only presents the past events but also gives meaning to them in the context of the present. *Tale-Danda* is rooted in the twelfth century of Indian history. Karnad is not contesting history in this play as one finds in *Tughlaq*. He uses this historical source as a tool to make us think about the issues which seem perennial. He rings the bell of awareness for the whole society which is torn by caste conflicts. He makes us revisit Indian past and learn lessons from it so as to eradicate some problems which India is still facing in the present. In *Bali-The Sacrifice*, Karnad uses Indian Jain myth of thirteenth century and again presents the pluralistic Indian culture where violence is perpetuated in the



name of religion. In this play, we see the tussle between Jainism and Hinduism represented by the Queen—a practitioner of Jain belief and the Queen Mother—a practitioner of Hindu belief. In its social, moral and cultural ramifications, the play generates fresh philosophical thinking on Indian tradition, its values, moral conflicts, dilemmas and difficulties. He delineates the Jain view that violence in thought is as condemnable as the actual violence and regrets that for violence and bloodshed, the spirit of religion is often neglected and rituals are highlighted.

As Karnad is not only concerned with rewriting history and refining myth but also seeking relevance between past and present, an attempt has been made to explore the ways in which his select plays illustrate the ‘presentness of the past’. The study also aims to explore the plays as an exercise to retrieve that vast dormant cultural archive that seems endangered particularly as India’s indigenous cultures are under constant threat from modernization or the grip of globalization. This cultural retrieval is done not only in terms of the thematic concerns of his plays but also the technicalities of his art. He has made use of Indian folk theatre conventions and traditions like Yakshagana, Bayalata and Natak Company tradition which are pushed to periphery by Western influences and modern modes of entertainment, be it cinema or the modern theatre. It aims to study how Karnad retrieves Indian culture with its negative and positive dimensions and makes us sensitive to the problems that seem to

engulf present day India. It also aims to study how Karnad delineates the issues of communalism/religious frenzy and caste division which pose most serious threat to the fabric of Indian nationhood.

The study is divided into five chapters and conclusion. In Chapter I entitled, “European Drama: A Historical Perspective”, an attempt has been made to trace the history of drama as a genre. Through a discussion on some eminent dramatists, the themes in their plays and the technicalities of their art, it tries to show how drama originated as a form of low entertainment and got established as a genre of world acclaim with philosophical, socio-cultural and political orientations.

In Chapter II entitled, “Evolution of Indian English Drama: An Overview”, an attempt has been made to trace the genesis of IED and its development through a discussion on Indian English Dramatists. It discusses the thematic concerns and technicalities of their art. It also shows how Indian English dramatists have dived deep into their own culture and presented its vibrant and vital issues. The chapter also reflects on the poor growth of IED though it made its debut before Indian English Novel and Poetry.

Chapter III entitled, “Girish Karnad as a Dramatist”, shows the overall contribution of Girish Karnad to the IED. It reflects the technicalities and thematic concerns of Karnad’s plays. It shows the influences that went a long way in shaping his dramatic imagination. It

also shows his attachment to Indian past—myths, history, folktales—and contemporary reality which enrich his dramatic oeuvre.

In Chapter IV entitled, “*Tughlaq: Re-enacting History*”, an attempt has been made to show how Karnad re-enacts history of Mohammed bin Tughlaq to subvert the received history given by Orientalist and official historiographers. In Postcolonial theory, the supremacy of Occident has been challenged. Edward Said is of the view that Orient exists as a set of already available and spoken ideas that permeate through civil society in a wide range of texts. He sees Orientalism as a ‘textual attitude’ towards Orient which has produced him as uncivilized, irrational and unscientific. From this perspective, an attempt has been made to see how Karnad scrutinizes the dominant Orientalist and Official narratives about India and fills gaps in Indian historiography. An attempt has been also made to show how Karnad retrieves Indian culture by turning to Indian Natak and folk theatre tradition.

In Chapter V entitled, “*Cultural Retrieval in Tale-Danda and Bali-The Sacrifice*”, an attempt has been made to explore the select plays with a view to understand the cultural retrieval that Karnad is able to achieve through his plays. It tries to show how Karnad enriches our knowledge about the cultural past of India and delineates the ‘presentness’ of the past. It tries to show how Karnad’s deep rooted vision in Indian history,

myths, and folktales enable him to reflect on the very vibrant issues of present-day India: communalism, caste division etc.

In conclusion, an attempt has been made to sum up Karnad's approach to Indian past and his presentation of Indian culture. It also hints towards Karnad's assessment of Indian past, present and future.

## **Chapter: 1**

### **European Drama: A Historical Perspective**

Drama is defined as a literary form meant to be enacted on stage by actors before an audience. More than two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, offered an apt definition of drama as an “imitation of action” in his work *The Poetics* written in 335 B.C. According to him, “The aim of drama is to instruct and delight the spectators by the artistic representation of human emotions and passions” (Quoted in Sreerekha 2011: 3). It is a representation of carefully selected actions by living people on stage. We cannot take action out of drama as it is an art which requires performance on stage for its full effect. The action of the drama is not real action but action imitated or represented. The action of the drama can be highly physical or internal/psychological. The various essential elements of drama are the language, the setting, the gestures, costumes, make-up and dialogue and a careful combination of these elements contribute to the creation of the meaning of a performance. Defining drama as imitation of an action also distinguishes it from other literary forms (Novel or other narrative work) where action is only described, not imitated. Through performance, a text attains perfection, unfolding itself within the limits of time and space. G. B. Tennyson says,

“Drama is a story that people act on a stage before spectators” (Quoted in Watson1983: 1). One can say that here, stress is on the theatricality of drama.

The history of dramatic activity goes far back, beyond historical or literary records, and virtually every culture in every period has produced spectacles of one kind or another. The tradition of European Drama began with the ancient Greeks about twenty-five hundred years ago. Spectacles and all kinds of performances were produced in many Greek cities, but drama developed in Athens. The theatre of ancient Greece evolved from religious rites which date back to at least 1200 B.C. This cult involved uninhibited dancing and emotional displays that created an altered mental state:

This altered state was known as ‘ecstasies’ from which the word ecstasy is derived...Ecstasy was an important concept to Greeks, who would come to see theatre as a way of releasing powerful emotions through its ritual power. Though it met with resistance, the cult spread to south through the tribes of Greece over the ensuing six centuries.

(Online)

In ancient Greece “ritualized dancing and singing were essential elements of daily life and culture” (Sreerekha 2011: 3). Musical performances and dramatic recitations both were part of the four religious festivals associated with the annual grape harvest held between December and March. The festivals honoured Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry. Beginning in the sixth century B.C., three of the festivals

featured public competitions in drama but the most important of them was the 'City Dionysia', held for about five days in the late March or early April. For many years, the festival included several days of dithyramb contests—competitions involving hymns or narrative lyric sung by a large chorus. This was followed by the main competition between dramatists, who were sponsored by wealthy individuals. Each playwright produced a trilogy of tragedies and one satyr play over a period of three days. The three tragedies focused on a single subject or on unrelated subject while the satyr play ordinarily consisted of a farce on an erotic subject and Dionysian theme, with actors costumed as satyrs, half man and half goat. By the sixth century B.C., a masked actor was introduced into the dithyrambs. This actor would engage in a dialogue with chorus, and this can validly be seen as birth of theatre. This innovation is credited to Thespis, a priest of Dionysus, a playwright as well as a poet. According to a Greek chronicle of 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., Thespis was also the first winner of a theatrical award.

Tragedy and comedy are two kinds of drama that we find in Greek period. Aeschylus was the first dramatist to use two characters and turned dithyramb into drama. He added second actor (antagonist) to interact with the first and introduced props and scenery and reduced the chorus from fifty to twelve. In his plays, he makes a point, echoed by historians, dramatists and psychologists: that the root of evil and suffering is usually

human arrogance. On the dramatic level, the plays convey the suffering of a family torn apart by patricide and matricide. According to Ewans:

Aeschylus unfolds a vision of our world as a place where every act has its inevitable, far reaching consequences, and everyone ultimately receives his deserts-a fate which is the exact consequence of what he has done. He offers us a fierce, tragic but ultimately affirmative view of mankind, and of the limits which have been set upon our actions by higher powers working within and around us.

(Ewans 1983: 25)

Aeschylus' plays that have survived are *The Suppliants*, *The Persians*, *The Seven Against Thebes* and *Prometheus Bound*, and his crowning work is the *Orestia*, a trilogy of tragedies (*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* and *The Eumenides*) first performed in 458 B.C. Thematically, the trilogy talks of excessive human pride, arrogance or hubris and investigates the effects of a curse from one generation to the next. In this context, Coldewey and Streitberger (1998: 24) say:

The trilogy is not only a story of curse working its way through generations but a story about the development of human consciousness itself and about the cost of such development.

Sophocles introduced the third actor in Greek drama and stressed on drama between humans rather than between the humans and gods. His most famous plays that have survived are *Ajax*, *Trachiniae*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*. His plays are full of irony and are about the folly of arrogance and the wisdom of accepting fate.



*Antigone* explores the meaning and limits of a citizen's duty of obedience to law and authority and of the Athenian's oath of allegiance. The responsibilities of leaders, military and political, to those whom they lead, are as much a theme of *Ajax* or *Oedipus the King* as of *Seven against Thebes* or *The Persians*. According to Sommerstein, "Sophocles' plays do not normally bear any direct relation to specific contemporary events, but in a broader sense most of them are highly relevant to the public concerns of a polis community" (Sommerstein 2002: 47).

Euripides was another dramatic talent to emerge on scene in Athens. His repertoire includes *Medea*, *The Children of Heracles*, *The Trojan Women*, *Ion*, *The Bacchae* etc. However, Euripides' plays were not about gods or royalty but provided place for peasants alongside princes. He showed the reality of war, criticized religion and portrayed the forgotten of society: women, slaves and the old. In this context, Sommerstein says, "Contemporaries felt that whereas Aeschylus and Sophocles made their major characters seem larger than life, Euripides made his seem very much like the people they met every day" (Sommerstein 2002: 56). His characters usually fall well within the normal range of physical, mental and spiritual qualities. We often do not find the commanding, self-sufficient hero in his plays or if he appears, he is brought low and learns to depend on the aid and support of others. Although contemporaries accused him of being a misogynistic, because

he so often presented women (Phaedra, stheneboea for instance) committing atrocious acts such as adultery and child-murder. But the fact is that these women, like other major characters, were made eloquent advocates for the justice of their case. In this context, Sommerstein (2002: 57) says, "Medea questions the institution of marriage and justifies the murder of her children; Phaedra's nurse argues, uncontradicted, that there is nothing wrong with adultery...". Euripides added to dramatic form the prologue, which set the stage at the beginning of the play. Although far behind in medal count with a mere five, Euripides has since eclipsed both Sophocles and Aeschylus in popularity. The modern attraction to him is because his point of view finds a strong echo in modern attitudes. In his plays, we find less contrivance, fate or philosophy than in either Aeschylus or Sophocles and there is instead a poignant realism.

The historical development of the comedy is not as well recorded as that of tragedy. Greek comedy had two periods: 'Old Comedy' represented by Cratinus and Aristophanes, and 'New Comedy', whose main exponent was Menander. Although middle period also existed but the middle comedy is largely lost, i.e. preserved only in relatively short fragments in authors such as Athenaeus of Naucratis. As no complete middle comic plays have been preserved, it is impossible to offer any real assessment of their literary value. In 'Old Comedy' period, Aristophanes

is the sole important figure who is worthwhile to be mentioned. His plays that have survived are *The Acharnians*, *The Knights*, *The Wasps*, *Lysistrata*, *The Clouds*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, *The Frogs* and *Wealth* etc. In his plays, Aristophanes ridiculed the gods, Athenian institutions, popular and powerful individuals, and we also find in them the mistaken identities, ironic situations, ordinary characters and wit. “The most important old comic dramatist is Aristophanes, whose works, with their pungent political satire and abundance of sexual and scatological innuendo, effectively define the genre today” (Wikipedia). Aristophanes lampooned the most important personalities and institutions of his day, as can be seen, for example, in his buffoonish portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds*, and in sexual and political farce *Lysistrata*. *Lysistrata* openly challenges Athenian social codes that prevented women from participation in government, leveling political criticism—however hilarious—at the governors of Athens. In this context, Coldewey and Streitberger (1998: 97) say, “In this play it is the women who have the viable political vision, but they find it difficult to come by the will to make that vision a reality”.

Menander is regarded as the representative of ‘New Comedy’. His plays are *The Shield*, *The Curmudgeon*, *The Arbitration*, *Hated*, *Shorn*, *The Girl from Samos* and *The Sicyonian*. The crucial plot elements of Menandrian comedy are love, deception and discovery. For the first time

love became a principal element in the drama. In this context, Sommerstein (2002: 72) says:

Virtually every play contains a young man in love (sometimes more than one) who meets and overcomes, usually with considerable assistance from good fortune, the obstacles posed to his desires by parents, pimps, rich soldiers or other hostile agencies.

Nearly always many of the characters are kept ignorant of vital facts, either through circumstances or through the machinations of others, and much of the action springs from such machinations; the truth is generally known to the audience and its discovery by the characters tends to be a climactic moment in the action. Sommerstein (2002: 73) says, “Almost always the play ends with one or more betrothals, with the reconciliation of a married couple, or with the winning of a desirable hetaira by an impecunious youth”.

In the middle ages, the roman theatre came under the control of Roman Catholic Church. In theatre liturgical dramas were performed by priests and church members in churches and monasteries. There were three types of dramas: Mystery or Cycle plays, Miracle plays and Morality plays. Mystery plays were sanctioned by church, but produced by guilds. They portrayed the cycle of Christian history from the creation of the world until the last judgment. In this context, Coldewey and Streitberger (1998: 157) say:

Their purpose was to teach Christian history in memorable and entertaining form. They were performed not by clerics and priests but by crowds of people, and were watched not in monasteries but in the streets of cities and towns, often as a part of special feast day celebrations...

Miracle plays dramatized the lives, the conversions, the miracles, and sometimes the martyrdom of saints. The most famous and influential of them are the morality plays, which flourished from the fourteenth century through sixteenth century. These plays taught a lesson through allegorical characters representing vices or virtues. In Morality plays, “[T]he characters represented abstract qualities, common virtues and vices, and the eternal struggle between good and evil” (Sreerekha 2011: 4). One could see virtue, ignorance, prudence and sloth as characters on stage in a Morality play. These show the spiritual struggle for salvation and their plots revolved around temptation or summoning to death or other religious themes, including the actual judgment in heaven. The period between 1576 and 1642 is often called the Golden Age of English Drama, although this period saw some turbulent changes. Writers grappled with the flood of new discoveries, ideas and technologies. The contradictions in every arena are registered in the experiences of the protagonists of the drama of the age. The new emphasis on individual thought, action and responsibility can be found in all forms of endeavor during these times, from religion to science. Coldewey and Streitberger (1998: 207) say:

Humanity is no longer represented in the experience of abstract types like everyman or mankind, but rather in towering, fully realized figures like Faustus, Hamlet, and King Lear, characters who face the insolvable mysteries of the age and whose pain is unique.

The drama of the period was relatively free to respond to social issues and concerns of the age, inspired rather than hampered by the tradition. Religious and political issues were not allowed to be the subject-matter of the drama. Despite such regulation, the theatre could not have survived without the support of the court. In the mid-1570s some companies like 'Kings Men' got approval from authorities and public theatres began to be built and licensed in London.

Plays were performed in public and private theatres and at the court. Shakespeare's writing career acts as a convenient register of how fashion changed. Before 1600, he wrote history plays on English subjects, such as Richard II and Henry IV and on Roman subjects, such as Julius Ceaser. He also wrote romantic comedies, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like it*, at this time. He then wrote his successful tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. His comedies were concerned with serious moral and social problems. Towards the end of his career, he wrote romances such as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, plays dealing with forgiveness and hope.

Marlowe was the first great dramatic celebrant of the 'aspiring mind' of 'Renaissance Man' and it is this renaissance spirit— desire to

comprehend and dominate the universe—which gets reflected in *Doctor Faustus*. In overall conception and in certain structural details, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is greatly influenced by English morality play tradition. Faustus is a moral child whose crucial act—signing of the bond—invites his damnation while simultaneously it begins the painful process of his moral and emotional education. Coldewey and Streitberger (1998: 213) state that Faustus is perhaps one of the finest expressions of renaissance aspirations in the drama of the period. He signs away his immortal soul in order to seek knowledge of the nature of heaven and hell, of the motions of the stars and of the ultimate physical and metaphysical questions and indulges in luxury and buffoonery. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe charts a collision course between the comforting certainties of the medieval world and the anxieties of the modern world. Faustus is torn between these alternatives and his tragedy is, to an extent, the tragedy of the age in which he lives. The intensity with which Marlowe scrutinizes his protagonists' divided mind gave impetus to the greatest tragedies of the Elizabethan period. In this context, Nicoll (1976: 219) says, "This, above all other dramas, is the foundation of Shakespeare's tragedy".

Like *Dr. Faustus*, Shakespeare's tragedies concentrated on the inner moral life of the protagonist, its growth or debasement which connects it with the Christian world view. However, Shakespeare suppresses, to the benefit of his tragedies, explicit theological references.

Similarly, evil is more 'humanized' in Shakespeare, being diffused through and embodied in more naturalistically conceived characters. His greatest strength is his characterization. Many twentieth century critics like G. Wilson Knight see the plays as visionary statements which embody some impersonal generalization on human life, or dramatic poems creating meaning through densely interlocking verbal patterns. Shakespeare's greatness lies in making his characters come to life and in making audiences or readers care intensely about what happens to them. In his tragedies, we witness the destruction or waste of human fineness and this loss is connected with the spread of evil spilling outwards like a deadly poison from some single act of folly and feeding on everything that comes in its way. This evil is later destroyed but this is no cause for rejoicing since the good and the innocent have been destroyed too. Suffering is also educative and ultimately redemptive. Cordelia, Kent and the Fool all attempt to instruct Lear in the ways of wisdom, but, according to Duthie, "his most effective teacher is suffering...He learns repentance, humility and charitable fellow-feeling with even the lowest of distressed humanity" (Quoted in Watson 1983: 66). In *King Lear*, we see an expression of a profoundly religious view of life. The universe has a purpose, love and goodness or the balm of hurt minds, suffering can lead to moral salvation.



Shakespeare also wrote comedies highlighting issues like the irrationality of love, social value of love and marriage. Ben Jonson's kind of comedy is different from Shakespeare's both in method and effect. In the prologue to *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), Ben Jonson claimed that his comedies were essentially realistic—that we would find in them deeds and language such as men do use. Some of Ben Jonson's writing seems to be a thinly veiled attack on Shakespearean comedy because it is 'romantic'—romantic in the sense that it employs strange, wondrous, essentially non-realistic materials. It is not easy to call Shakespeare 'Romantic' and Ben-Jonson realistic. Ben-Jonson's characterization is fantastic, distorted and extravagant as can be seen easily by thinking of characters in *Volpone* (1606) or of Sir Epicure in the *Alchemist* (1610). The crucial distinction between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson lies not in the degrees of relative 'Realism' but in the fact that Jonson's comedy is satiric and that its aim is to hold folly to overt ridicule. In spirit and techniques, his work resembles the classical writers of antiquity who insisted on the corrective function of comedy than the medieval romance tradition which influenced Shakespeare. Ben Jonson laid emphasis on the idea that comedy should be "accommodated to the correction of manners" (Quoted in Watson 1983: 92) which had been put forward by the Roman orator Cicero. The effect is very different from the sense of the festive celebration and ceremonious reconciliation in

Shakespearean comedy. Some critics feel that many of Ben Jonson's plays, and especially *Volpone*, can hardly be called comic at all. *Volpone* is a universal satire on man's greed and gullibility. The venation setting enables him to mount a devastating attack on the materialism of renaissance Europe and the resemblances between the play's world and acquisitive modern society need no stressing elaboration.

In latter developments in comedy, Moliere is one the world's great comic masters. His plays like *Tartuffe* (1664), *The Misanthrope* (1660), *The Affected Ladies* (1659) and *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670) expose the hypocrisy and lust, the hyper-refinement of fashionable partisans, their over-elaborate manners and grotesquely convoluted 'polite conversation'. His plays do not often judge from absolute norms of religion and morality, but from more relative social standards. His aim is to correct and improve the manners of society, by reducing affectation rather than lashing vice. For instance, Dorine, the maid of the household in *Tartuffe*, her spirit and commonsense, as well as her role in the play, relate her clearly to the witty slave of the Roman comedy of Plautus and Terence, and show Moliere's instinctive awareness of ancient comic traditions. *Tartuffe*'s concentration on serious vice and in the monstrosity of the central figure resembles Jonson's *Volpone*. However, Moliere's play is at once less extreme than Jonson's and yet more somber. Jonson exaggerates his types of greed and credulity to fantastic degrees so that

despite the deep moral thrust of *Volpone*, we are made to share in the dramatist's enjoyment of and relish for the world he has created. However, the pervasive value of Moliere's dramas is that of good sense, the pursuit of the golden mean. As Philinte in *The Misanthrope* says, "True reason lies in shunning all extremes". His comedy makes fun of those follies which are a threat to the structure of the society as that society may be conceived of by a rational man who did not expect human beings to be perfect. Watson (1983: 104) states that its (Moliere's comedy) valuation of social standards helped to create and give powerful impetus to the comedy of manners in both France and Restoration England. He is not, however, a complacent cynic who accepts the way of the world. His masterpiece, *The Misanthrope*, dramatizes the conflict between a man's attempt to sustain his individual integrity and the compromises forced on him by the dictates of the social living. Alceste talks against the tiny daily hypocrisies of social living and for uncompromising honesty which is opposed by Philinte who says, "What is needed in society is an accommodating virtue. It is wrong to be too high principled". Moliere's play dramatizes with wit and profundity the central issue of comedy, the problems of living in society.

With the restoration of Charles II to the throne of England in 1660, theatres were reopened after eighteen years. Restoration comedies concern themselves, like Moliere's, with social manners, but with a

crucial narrowing of range and tone. The plays' audiences were comprised of gallants, men-about town, courtiers and people of fashion who were hostile to the values of the bourgeoisie and citizenry which they saw unstylish and dominated by a repugnant puritan earnestness. Restoration Comedy is realistic in that it reflects a real society, even if that society lacks any depth. The plays of George Etherege (1635-91) illustrate most of the above generalizations. However, it is wrong to generalize too sweepingly about Restoration Comedy. The plays of William Congreve (1670-1729), though included in this kind of comedy, came much later than those of Etherege. In *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700), we see comedy moving away from sparkling if brittle depiction of manners to the mode of sentimentalism which was to dominate the eighteenth century. Congreve's dialogue has an impressive suppleness in its wit than other dramatists like Etherege's where dialogue often seems studied, over-consciously aphoristic. His characters too insist on keeping the masks on; they too believe in style, but Congreve manages to suggest the reality of human conditions at the end of *The Way of the World*. The play is a satire of manners and he uses the complicated relationships among the characters to point out the foibles of this callous and self seeking society.

The dramas of William Wycherley (1640-1716), especially *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Plain Dealer* (1676), reach back to the

works of the great masters, the first to Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and Moliere's *The School of the Wives* (1669) and later to *The Misanthrope*. This does not, however, mean that Wycherley stands outside, or apart from the general ethos of Restoration Comedy. In *The Country Wife*, the Majory pinchwife shows that ultimately what Restoration Comedy dramatizes most confidently is the artifice and convention of the society it reflects. It was inevitable that the cynicism of Restoration Comedy, especially in its earlier phase, should produce a reaction. Even from the time of Congreve, the beginnings of the movement from the Comedy of Manners to the Sentimental Comedy were under way. Oliver Gold Smith (1728-74) in an essay "A comparison between laughing and sentimental comedy" (1772) sums up the construction of the Sentimental Comedy of the eighteenth century:

Deck out the hero with a riband, or give a heroine a title: then....put an insipid dialogue, without character or humour, into their mouths, give them mighty good hearts, very fine clothes, furnish a new set of scene, make a pathetic scene or two, with a sprinkling of tender melancholy conversation throughout the whole, and there is no doubt but all the ladies will cry and the gentleman applaud.

Goldsmith's play, *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) is his best attempt to write such a Sentimental Comedy as it makes skillful use of basic comic situations and in the character of Tony Lumpkin offers a pleasing reminder of the richness of Shakespearean clowns who are stupid and shrewd at the same time.

R. B. Sheridan (1751-1816) who was in favour of Comedy of Manners, wished to banish Sentimental Comedy from the stage. His comedy *The Rivals* (1775) has all the sparkle of Restoration Comedy, though the characters are more interested in marriage than in sexual intrigues. His *School for Scandal* (1775) is a fine exposure of the scandalmongers like Benjamin Backbille, Lady Sneerwell and is highly entertaining but also makes its point. The elegance and verbal felicity of Sheridan's writing predicts, over the comic waste land of the next century, the superbly brilliant repartee of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). His *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) revels in its own improbability and absurdity, consistently farcical in tone, characterization and plot. Watson (1983: 111) says:

Comedy here seems to have created a world all of its own; when we look closer, we see our own world, after all, through the irreverent gaiety of an iconoclastic mind. The line from Wilde to Shaw is clear; and after Shaw perhaps only Tom Stoppard in contemporary times has come near Wilde's marvelous verbal dexterity.

### **Modern Drama**

Before coming to Modern Drama, mention may be made of Melodrama and Well-Made play. Melodrama was the most popular form of drama in the nineteenth century. Melodrama observes strict moral justice: good and evil are embodied in stock characters, in predictable action, and often in an explicit moral. We can see its followers both in France and Germany. Following on the heels of Melodrama's popularity, a new form—Well-

Made play—made its debut in France. Its popularity can be attributed to Augustan Eugene Scribe (1791-1861). In his plays, we can see a careful exposition of the situation; careful preparation of future events, growing suspense, unexpected reversals and a logical resolution. The term Well-Made play was originally used as a compliment to describe the tightly knit plots for which Scribe became famous.

Henerik Ibsen (1828-1906) may be regarded as the father of Modern Drama. He is seen as a social realist concerned with the special issues relevant to his day and age. His plays like *The Pillars of the Society* (1877), *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881), dealing with the small town corruption, women's rights, venereal disease, brought a revolutionary new kind of social reality on to the European stage. From these kinds of topics was distilled what Shaw calls 'Quintessence of Ibsenism'—an essay on Ibsen by George Bernad Shaw written in 1891. He is seen "as a sort of expert consultant doctor, standing by the bedside of the sick patient (society), making a series of diagnosis of specific diseases, and dolling out the appropriate prescriptions" (Watson 1983: 112). He also employed an intensely dramatic method. He switched to prose after writing many plays in verse because he found it an appropriate medium for his vision of exploring 'ordinary existence'. He is not only interested in verisimilitude, mere surface realism, reproduction of life like, probable speech, behavior and environment but delves deep beneath

it and unfolds an intense psychological drama. In *Hedda Gabler* (1890), Hedda is married into a claustrophobic family completely hostile to her conception of herself as a free, proud and aristocratic spirit. The realistic surface details enable us to penetrate that surface to the hidden truth beneath. The real inner center of Ibsen's drama is its portrayal of the fundamental clash between man and society. This prevents his plays from seeming dated and gives some of them what many feel a tragic intensity. Ibsen believed in individualism, that it was man's nature to strive to achieve the fullest realization of his selfhood and his belief in this freedom is built into all his great protagonists. He does not advocate superficial changes in social structure but rather with fundamental opposition between man's individualistic aspirations and his bondage to societal forces. Ibsen makes us see this battle with the self that an individual discovers with himself rather than individual confronts unyielding society in a somewhat melodramatic way. Northam's words are appropriate here:

For a man of Ibsen's generation the great opponent of man was seen to be society—not just society in its 'problem play' aspect, the source of definable, limitable, and often remediable misery, but society as a force working through a myriad of obscure agencies and trivial occasions, but working with a power and mystery comparable to that displayed by the Greek gods or the Elizabethan universe.

(Quoted in Watson 1983: 123)



Both Shaw and Brecht, like Ibsen, derive their dramatic ideas and form from a consideration of man's relationship with society. Shaw was a socialist and Brecht a Marxist. But their dramas differ in spirit and texture from that of Ibsen, whom Shaw greatly admired. As Shaw presented Ibsen in the 'Quintessence of Ibsenism' he is seen as a social reformer whose chief contribution is his exposure of outmoded or repressive codes and attitudes—social, political, moral and sexual. This is very much an Ibsen in Shaw's image. Shaw in his work attacked the current morality and ideology of the late Victorian Britain. In his plays like *Arms and The Man* (1894), *Man and Superman* and *Major Barbara* (1905), he satirizes the blind orthodoxies of current idealizations of military glory and romantic love, the common cult of 'respectability', and dramatizes the falsity of the notion that poverty is in some way connected with moral worth. Shaw shows his slum dwellers and unemployed working class as cynical, hypocritical, aggressive and obsequious. In short, he sees poverty as demoralizing. Shaw seems to resemble Plato in general outlook because both were concerned with ethical reform and insisted that art should be socially useful. He was interested in drama of ideas. He himself said in the 1902 'Preface' to *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894) that "the drama of pure feeling is no longer in the hands of the playwright; it has been conquered by the musician... and there is, flatly, no future now, for any drama except the drama of thought". However, this doesn't mean that

his plays are only dramatized debates where characters are only mouthpieces for his ideas. No, they are driven emotionally, spiritually as well as intellectually by their ideas which constitute any given character's outlook on or approach to life and hence are more than philosophical debates. He also proposed his theory of creative evolution, which he called life force. This is actually optimistic and melioristic view that the universe is purposeful, that there is working in everyman, especially the philosopher, what in *Man and Superman* is called "[l]ife's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clear self-understanding". Man responding to those aspirations will himself eventually evolve into what Shaw, borrowing the term from Nietzsche calls, superman.

*Major Barbara* represents a significant step forward for a drama with a political or social message. The true resolution of Shaw's plays, as with many Brecht's play's, belongs not inside the work itself, but outside it, in society. The audience is left to think out the problems which Shaw has raised. The audience has to imagine a world in which power would be in moral hands and direction towards worthy ends. So Shaw's plays are engaged directly with major social issues as Brecht said of him. He says, "Shaw's literary preoccupation does not separate him from life" (Quoted in Watson 1983: 157).

Brecht became a Marxist in early 1930's and this affected the thrust and direction of his art and underpins his mature dramas like *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Life of Galileo*, *The Good Woman of Szechwan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, all written in exile. His plays embody a radical extension of Shaw's socialist ideas, but in no sense are regarded as simplistic propaganda pieces. Coldewey and Streitberger (1998: 808) state that Brecht wanted his plays to develop critical sophistication in his audiences which might carry over into their social lives. They also state that in his plays, he expects his audience to come to their own understanding of what is being presented on stage, and he also preferred his characters to be viewed from different perspectives. His theoretical optimism is heavily qualified by his sense of cowardice, cruelty and destructiveness of human nature. He avoids the facile optimism by concentrating on why the world should be changed, rather than how it will be after the change. He uses Marxism as a weapon for criticizing society as it is, and is not interested in creating utopian portraits of an ideal world, based purely on dogma. He rejected the naturalist drama which he calls Aristotelian or dramatic or 'Ibsenite' drama and this rejection lead to his own influential theory of drama. He believed that it (Aristotelian drama) creates a total illusion of reality and objects to its verisimilitude, that is, its presentation of events, people and settings on the stage in such a way as to persuade the audience to suspend

disbelief and to take the illusion for reality. Raymond Williams (1964: 318) says, “What Brecht seized on was the exclusion, by particular conventions of verisimilitude, of all direct commentary, alternative consciousness, and alternative points of view”. He believes that it denies any alternative way of looking at the events presented so that the audience is compelled to take the situation as an unalterable truth and emotional involvement of the audience weakens their capacity to reflect critically on what is being presented on stage. In place of ‘Aristotelian’ theatre, he created his own ‘Epic Theatre’ which might be better termed as ‘open’ theatre, because most of the techniques which he invents for plays like *Mother Courage and Her Children* are aimed at changing the relationship between play and its audience in the direction of ‘openness’. His techniques invite the audience to consider critically possible alternatives courses of action to those adopted by the dramatic characters, and insist that theatre is only a theatre and that plays are not life but they may help us to understand it. Sreerekha aptly says:

His intention was to transport the audience to a heightened state of social and political awareness rather than getting them emotionally involved in the dramatic process...he wanted to enhance the audience participation by inviting them to develop their own thoughts and criticism about the events on the stage with clarity of mind.

(Sreerekha 2011: 12)

The effect of these techniques may be summed up in the German word ‘*Verfremdungskefft*’ which means making strange or distancing. It

also means de-familiarization. In his plays, it is not a method of grotesque or surrealistic exaggeration but an attempt to make us see ordinary life in a fresh way, to purge the film of familiarity from our eyes. His plays have remote and historical settings which is a deliberate artistic intention because Brecht is not interested in fidelity to surface appearance which is a feature of naturalist drama. He believed that displacing our problems may enable us to see them more clearly and to explore more fully a general idea like the connections between war and capitalism.

Brecht rejects plot in favour of narrative. Each scene can be taken by itself, often long periods of time separate them. In it, we see action as a continuing process. The outcome of the action is 'open', not predetermined: what happens depends on human decision, not on some abstract concept like fate or inevitability. Mother Courage curses war when Kattrin is slashed across the eye and forehead. In scene VII, she is happy because her business works well. Attention is switched away from Courage's emotional core, on to the incidents which she responds to. Brecht creates an antidote to theatrical illusion. Audience is aware that he is in the theatre and barrier between audience and stage is lowered. The whole point of the Epic Theater is to allow for, invite, stimulate critical attitude to what is presented and the breadth of perspective which Brecht brings to bear enables the audience to see the validity of the anti-heroic

stance, but also its limitations in the particular context. Coldewey and Streitberger (1998: 808) say:

Brecht's theater worked to alienate or estrange the audience from the realities of ordinary life, which they had come to accept as natural and inevitable...He refused to interpret the action in his plays, instead requiring the audience to come to their own understanding of how events are connected and what they might mean.

Modern Drama would be incomplete without the mention of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). His plays opened up new possibilities for the stage in their exploration of the nature and limitations of theatre and their exploration of the limitations of language. In order to push the limits of drama, he exposed away virtually all of the traditional elements of theatre by employing spare settings, few actors and nothing in the way of conventional action. Action in his plays has progressed to inaction. In the play *Not I* (1972) the only action is the mouth of a woman speaking and *Breath* (1970), sixty seconds long, contains only the sounds of breathing and cries. According to Watson, "This drama is skeptical about the validity, even the existence of eternal reality: everything beyond the subjective consciousness of the individual is illusory and even consciousness may be illusory" (Watson 1983: 171). Though Brecht wishes the audience to approach critically from critical reaction to his plays, Beckett breaks the boundaries between stage and audience because he has the feelings that what is called real life is as much an illusion as anything on the stage. Beckett is referred as an 'Absurd' dramatist, a term

popularized by Martin Esslin (a dramatist, Professor of drama, best known for his term “The Theatre of Absurd” for his work of the same name). In his plays, there are feelings that are widely spread in the present times. The feeling that ‘God is dead’ is significant and this deprives man of the sense of the transcendental purpose of life whose only object seems to be death. Beckett’s plays don’t tell a story but only represent a situation or condition and it throws man on his little resources to attempt to give significance left by the disappearance of the God. The two tramps in *Waiting for Godot* employ various strategies to fill the void left and give them the impression that they exist. Estragon says, “We always find something to give the impression that we exist”. Beckett like Albert Camus is relevant in exposing the symptoms of the apparent existence. However, they observe that the ultimate destiny of man is tragic. Man is destined to suffering and despair on this planet. When we look at Beckett’s work, it reveals that he employs the ‘poetics of fragmentation’ (Dar 2008: 111) and his characters live between the world of becoming and being, hell and heaven, mind and heart, faith and despair. His characters are not only physically deformed but also mentally disintegrated. They are aware that they suffer without any fault of theirs. They see their life as a journey from nowhere to nowhere. Beckett and his characters remain lost in the fragments of thought, language, despair and useless repetition of broken, meaningless distorted

and reshaped sentences and words. In his texts, we see pauses, silences and dotted lines and his genius lies in exposing the insufficiency and incomprehensibility of language in so far as the perception and communication of reality is concerned. He subverts the very foundation of language, as there is no traditional plot development or lengthwise character portrayal in his works. In *Waiting for Godot*, nothing happens twice as no one comes nor goes and everything becomes awful. His ultimate insight is full of doubt, despair and dread because his mind convinces him that nothing exists outside mind. His search is merely reason oriented. Having negated all supra-rational reality in order to discover personality and sentimentality which is beyond human reason, he loses himself in the abyss of Absurd and irrationality. His people are God obsessed and struggle very hard to experience him. They ask why they are what they are and why are they conscious and their search starts from void, the nothing that lies behind reality. His characters search their true seat to escape suffering but they fail because the very search becomes obstacle.

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) is also one of the most powerful talents to emerge in the Britain in the twentieth century. His best-known plays include *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Homecoming* (1964) and *Betrayal* (1978). His talent remained disguised and his work misunderstood because his early plays coincided with the neo-realistic



movement on the stage and were sometimes referred to as ‘kitchen sink’ art. There was the seedy realism of his settings, references to London and its environs and above all, there was his wonderful accuracy of dialogue, his talent for creating the speech patterns of working class or working middle class English people. In this context, Behera (1998: 1) aptly says:

Pinter’s plays are made up of familiar everyday details which are inconsistent and self contradictory. His characters are socially recognizable but their actions are incongruous, their dialogues deceptive. It is because they desperately try to confront and placate reality—shapeless and nameless terrors of existence—by resorting to all sorts of illusions like lies, deceptions, make believes etc.

His own belief that his plays are about “the weasel under the cocktail cabinet” (in an interview with Anne Marie Cusac) provides an important insight on the nature of his dramatic world. Behera (1998: 1) states that the image of cocktail evokes the world of a ritual ridden society and the weasel suggests some threatening force lurking beneath. His plays indicate his concern with the mysterious and inscrutable aspects of life.

Though his plays have features of everyday details but the overall impression is that of Beckettian or Kafkasque absurdity. Bernard Dukore (Online) says, “Pinter’s characters reflect the tensions and the attitudes of present day England. The playwright moves them through highly inventive and bizarre theatrical patterns, but they unmistakably reflect a recognizable life of the world beyond the stage doors”. He shows people

reduced to nonentities and fighting in vain against being so reduced. In *Birthday Party*, he paints a frightening picture of the individual, pressurized by the forces of society to the point wherein he loses his individuality and becomes a dragged member of social machine. The picture that emerges before our eyes is of the man helplessly trapped in a vast and mysterious world, unable to know the cause of the suffering and all the time trying to find some ways out. His people are caught in struggle between reality and illusion—a situation where neither of the combatants wins nor loses but the reality grows more shocking and illusion more elusive. Pinter's work like his predecessors who have been grouped together in the 'Theater of Absurd'—Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett—shows a trend in contemporary theater which differs from clearly motivated characters with history, away from coherent plots and rational dialogue. He communicates inarticulateness in meaningful silences and in banal speech, which simply masks an underlying fear. Besides Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco—Tom Stoppard, Howard Barker (b. 1946) also contributed a lot to the contemporary European drama.

It can be said that Drama originated as a form of low entertainment, passed through different stages and influenced writers from different corners of the world. It travelled from Greek theatrical performances to England, where it found writers like Christopher

Marlowe, William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson and also reached the territories of Rome and France. In the meantime, it experienced various changes in technical aspects as well as in thematic concerns. It reached to various countries like Ireland, Africa, America and India and developed into the genre of world acclaim with philosophical, political and socio-cultural orientations. The growth and development of Drama in India is important and worthwhile, and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter II

### Evolution of Indian English Drama: An Overview

Drama being considered as the ‘Fifth Veda’ in India has had a rich and glorious tradition. Its genesis can be traced back to the Sanskrit plays. Keith (1992: 12) says, “Indian tradition preserved in the *Natyashastra*, the oldest of the texts on the theory of drama, claims for the drama a divine origin, and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves”. In the seasonal festivities of the Vedic Aryans, dramatic performances were arranged in which events of daily life, accompanied with music, were depicted. But later, episodes were taken from *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and *The Bhagavad-Gita* and enacted in front of the people.

Drama in Sanskrit literature is covered under the broad umbrella term, ‘rupaka’, which means depiction of life in its various aspects represented in forms by actors who assume various roles. Up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sanskrit dramas were staged but after it, Indian drama activity came to a halt because of foreign invasions. Naik aptly remarks:

And even when this tradition was broken after the Muslim invasion, it did not die but was absorbed into folk forms in several Indian languages actually gaining fresh vitality in the process, by drawing closer to common man.

(Naik 1984: 158)

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, smaller shows were performed in every state of India like *Jatra* and *Nautanki* in Bengal, *Bhand Jashin* in Kashmir, *Bhavai* in Gujarat, *Lalita*, *Khele*, *Dashavtar* and *Tamasha* in Maharashtra; *Yakshagana*, *Bayalata*, *Attadata*, *Doddata* and *Sannata* in Karnataka, *Veedhi-natakam* in Andhra Pradesh, *Ramleela* and *Rasleela* in Rajasthan, *Rass* and *Jhoomer* in Punjab and *Kutiyattam*, *Mohiniattam* and *Kathakali* dance dramas in Kerala.

So far as the evolution and development of Indian English drama is concerned, which is the main focus of this chapter, it saw its first light of the day when Krishna Mohan Benerjee wrote *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta* in 1831. In this play, he depicts the inconsistencies and blackness of the influential Hindu community. It shows the wiles and tricks of the Brahmins. It also presents the conflict in the mind of the sensitive Bengali youth between the orthodoxy and the new ideas ushered in by the Western education. It remained a single effort not only in Bengal but also elsewhere in India for more than a generation. However, the real journey of IED began with Michel Madhusudhan Dutt's translation of his Bengali plays *Is This Called Civilization* (1871), *Ratnavali* (1858), *Sermista* (1859) and a posthumously published play, *Nation Builders* (1922) but these plays, too, were not followed by a sustainable creative effort for decades together. It was only in the

twentieth century that Indian English drama after a long hiatus gathered momentum under the influence of British Drama. Before Independence, we see some important persons like Rabindranath Tagore, T. P. Kailasam, A. S. P. Ayyar, Lobo-Prabhu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai who contributed substantially to the evolution and development of IED.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the Noble Prize Winner for literature in Indian English Poetry, primarily wrote in Bengali and then translated his plays into English. His plays like *The Post Office* (1912), *Sacrifice* (1913), *Chitra* (1914) and *Mukhtadhara* (1922) are rooted in the Indian ethos in their themes and characters, and express his deepest convictions in creative terms. Sharada Iyer (2007) categorizes his plays into two groups—thesis plays and psychological plays. *Sanyasi*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Chitra*, *Malini*, *Sacrifice*, *Nitar Puja* and *Red Oleander* come under the first group while *The King and the Queen Kacha and Devayani*, *Karna and Kunti* and *The Mother's Prayer* fall under the second group. Thesis plays deal with social issues in realistic manner, expose social ills and stimulate thought and action while in psychological plays, the author delves deep into characters' inner lives and thought processes in order to make his point of view clear. Commenting on his characters, Iyer says, "[T]he characters are symbolic and allegorical in the

thesis plays, archetypal and universal in the psychological plays” (Iyer 2007: 3).

Rabindranath Tagore invested IED with symbolic overtones and allegorical significance. He served as an interpreter and mediator between the civilizations of East and West. Diana Devlin aptly says, “[T]he philosopher, writer and teacher Rabindranath Tagore set out to unify Indian and European traditions creating plays which have been described as mixture of Bengali folk drama and Western medieval mystery plays” (Quoted in Shukla 2006: 4). The plays that he himself translated have been almost rewritten to facilitate cultural difference to an alien language and hence are not merely literary translations.

Shri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was another major Indian English playwright whose dramatic genius lies in his five complete blank verse plays and six incomplete plays. The striking feature of his plays is that they deal with the different cultures and countries in different epochs. *Persues the Deliverer* (1944) is grounded in the Greek myth of Persues, *Vasavadutta* (1987) in romantic tales of ancient India, *Rodogune* (1959) is a Syrian romance and *Viziers of Bassora* (1959) take us to Persia. Besides *Persues the Deliverer* (1944), all his plays were published posthumously. The story of *Vasavadutta* (1987), in its main outlines, can be traced in Somadeva’s *Kathasaritsagara* and there is also the dramatic version of the same story by Bhasa in his *Svapna Vasavadutta*. It is more

deeply tinted with the hues of romance. Amar Nath Prasad (2007: 146) states that *Vasavadutta* is a fine blending of love, romance, innocence and experience. It is packed with the rich sentiments of love. In matters of plot construction and characterization, his debt to Elizabethan drama is undeniable but one does not miss the impact of Sanskrit playwrights as well. His plays are steeped in romance and poetry recollecting the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Sanskrit playwrights like Bhasa, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya also contributed to the Indian English Drama and has always been noted for his fecundity and versatility. He made his name as “he was the first to impart realism to drama and made it a vehicle for social protest and emergence of a significant working class” (Chandradeep and Khatri 2007: 5). His *Five Plays* (1937) is written in prose where writers’ socialist bent of mind is quite palpable. These plays are infused with realism and have a didactic and propagandist purpose. Srinivas Iyenger says:

*Five Plays*...contain some of his characteristic works as a playwright, revealing his social consciousness, flair for realism and like his prose writing [His] social plays are realistic and symbolic. They expose artificial ways of life, morality; suffering of the poor in a capitalistic economic order...these plays are indeed manifestoes of the new realism.

(Iyenger 1982: 234)



A. S. Panchpakesa Ayyar's reaction against the social ills like enforced widowhood, religious orthodoxy, superstition and hypocrisy brought him to the dramatic field. His plays are *In the Clutch of the Devil* (1926), *Sita's Choice and Other Plays* (1933), *The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays* (1941) and *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* (1941). His themes are reformistic and plots are melodramatic. He invests the drama with an ethical and social purpose. He used it as a tool for apprehending contemporary reality. In his reformistic zeal, he "is seen to be a vigorous critic of contemporary life" (Iyenger 1983: 242). He is regarded as one of the pioneers of historical plays, though he wrote only one historical play, *A Mother's Sacrifice*.

T. P. Kailasam (1885-1946) is another worth considering dramatic voice who came on the Indian literary scene when IED was still struggling for its existence and was waiting for an original talent who could infuse it with an elixir of life. He was a bilingual writer as he wrote in both Kannad and English but his genius found its full expression in his English plays. His plays are *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1983), *A Monologue* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944) and *The Curse of Karna* (1946). His imagination is deeply steeped in Indian culture, Hindu religious thoughts and myths. His plays are based on the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He is seen as an original talent who "invests the drama with ethical and social purpose by raising questions such as forgiveness

of wrongs and rights of women” (Iyer 2007: 5). His English plays show influence of puranic themes, though he interprets them in the intellectual language of today and shows how prose can be used as a fit medium for the expression of tragic emotions. In this context, Iyer says, “His rendering of puranic characters like Bharata, Krishna, Karna...has a touch of iconoclasm, but in actuality the idealism is deeper than the iconoclasm” (Iyer 2007: 5).

Bharati Sarabhai, who was the maiden woman playwright during the colonial era, gave Gandhian touch to Indian English Drama. Her plays like *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) show a distinct impact of Gandhian thought in terms of their themes. Commenting on *The Well of the People*, Iyer (2007: 6) says, “The play is an effective dramatization of how during the Gandhian age a new social awareness fused itself with the age-old religious consciousness. Thus leading to a resurgence of the spirit”. It is a pageant and a poetic expression of Sarabhai’s feelings and is “a play of considerable importance in the meager field of drama as Bharati Sarabhai ...makes an attempt to combine ambient Indian tradition with contemporary Indian troubles, political and economic” (Gowda 1998: 431).

Lobo Prabhu is the last name in pre-Independence IED. Only two of his plays got published before Independence—*Mother of New India* (1944) and *Death Abdicates* (1945). *Mother of New India* (1944) centres

on the theme of social reformation. Though Prabhu was adept in writing dialogues and in creating situations, his characters did not appear life-like and convincing to the audience. In this context, Iyenger says, “Lobo-Prabhu’s energy is obvious, he can write dialogues with facility, he can devise situations; but his characters are rarely alive, and his denouements are seldom wholly convincing” (Iyenger 1983: 242). However, Indian English drama was not competent to flourish as major current of creative expression. The reason is that the dramatists failed to evolve an independent dramatic convention suitable for Indian environment. Although Indian English drama had, up to 1947 poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical virtuosity, symbolic significance and commitment to human and moral values, it was not suitable for actual stage production.

In the post-Independence era, IED has had to continue the struggle for survival but the scene in post-Independence era is far better than the pre-Independence period. It did not flourish well because of the lack of regular theatre. Although some institutions like National School of Drama was established in Delhi; National Drama Festival was started in Delhi by the Sangeet Natak Academy, but all this led to the growth of drama in regional languages. However, some theatre groups in Mumbai, Calcutta and New Delhi successfully staged plays of Pratap Sharma, Gieve Patel, Asif Currimbhoy, Gurucharan Das, Shiv. K. Kumar, Girish Karnad,

Mahesh Dattani and others. All of them used different techniques and methods to enrich IED. One thing is clear that Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and Uma Pareswaran have proved more successful than others because of their attachment with theatre and their acting in TV serials.

The most prolific Indian English dramatist of post-Independence period is Asif Currimbhoy who wrote more than thirty plays within eighteen years. He wrote on a wide range and variety of subject-matter such as history and contemporary political, social and economic problems, the East-West encounter, religion, philosophy and art. His plays like *The Captives* (1963), *Goa* (1964), *Inquilab* (1970) and *The Refugee* (1971) deal with the socio-political and historical concerns. “Farce, comedy, melodrama, tragedy, history, fantasy: Currimbhoy handles them all with commendable ease” (Iyenger 1995: 732). He got the international reputation as his plays have been staged abroad also. He can contrive interesting situations, his dialogues are arresting and he has a sense of atmosphere and his plays are suitable for stage. In this context, Iyer (2007: 13) says, “Distinguished by careful craftsmanship and sensitive theatrical instinct, the plays of Asif Currimbhoy admirably illustrate the sophisticated artistry of contemporary Indian drama in English”. His dramatic output bears testimony to the fact that he has a message to deliver and a vision to fulfill. Being aware of the irredeemable absurdities of man, he “is always in search of the ways and means for the

betterment of human life” (Tandon 2006: 16). By introducing various theatrical techniques, he wants to shock the audience and make them feel for human suffering.

The tradition of poetic drama which was introduced by Tagore, Aurobindo and Kailasam continued after Independence through *Yama and Yami* (1948) by Manjari Isvaran, *Hali* (1950) by Desani, *Tiger Claw* (1967), *Vivekananda* (1972) and *Murder at the Prayer Time* (1976) by Lakhan Deb and *Rites for a Plebeian Statue* (1969) by Pritish Nandy. *Hali* is about man’s predicament, his confrontation with forces of good and evil, life and death, illusion and reality and his attempt to rise above these categories. *Tiger Claw* is a play on the controversial killing of Afzal Khan, the Muslim general of Bijapur by Shivaji. *Murder at the Prayer Time* deals with Gandhi’s life and death, his role in politics, the partition and the exodus of refugees, communal clashes and bloodshed.

Gurucharan Das’ *Larins Sahib* (1970) is a historical play in which he invokes the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial India and is based on the events in Punjab in 1846-47. He has used Indian forms as ‘larins’ for Lawrence, ‘Ka yar chalo Bhai’, ‘Angrej Badshah’ and transcreation of Indian expression as ‘Son of an Owl’ and ‘One Eyed Lion’ which impart naturalness and typical Indian flavour to the dialogues. He has taken some events from Indian history but has failed to show their relevance in

the present and he is satisfied with the coherent presentation of events.

Vangupal remarks:

The singular achievement of Das which I am sure that got him the Sultan Padamsree prize in 1968, is not so much his recreating history faithfully, as his portrayal of the essential human element of the historical characters captured in all his subtle.

(Quoted in Iyer 2007: 14)

Pratap Sharma's plays like *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor Has a War Cry* (1970) were staged abroad and present the dark side of society which perpetuates the existence of brothels and illegitimate sex. He has a keen sense of situation and his dialogue is often effective.

Nissim Ezekiel has also contributed to this genre though he is better known to us as a poet than as a dramatist. His *Three Plays* (1969) which consists of *Nalini*, *Marriage Poem* and *The Sleep Walkers*, deals with the hollowness of urban middle class, futility of social mores and the institution of marriage. His *Song of Deprivation* is a one-act comic morality play dealing with suppression and repression. According to Iyer, "In his satire of current fashion, exposure of poses and pretences he comes very near to the spirit of English social satirists" (Iyer 2007: 14).

Contemporary IED is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. It has laid the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth,

religion and folk lore in order to tackle contemporary socio-political issues. This theatrical tradition started by Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar prepared the background for contemporary Indian English Theatre. Girish Karnad is the leading dramatist who revitalized the Indian English drama by turning back to ancient English drama and showed how myth and history can serve as a powerful medium to dramatize contemporary situations. He is an impressive actor, intelligent director and powerful playwright who first writes in Kannad and then renders them into English which is a matter of ‘Transcreation’. He started his career as a dramatist when he had no established theatrical tradition to begin with. The Parsi Theatre had not produced any significant work and the Sanskrit Theatre had restricted itself to a group of wealthy and educated courtiers without having any appeal for general public. In his ‘Introduction’ to *Three Plays*, he stated:

To my generation a hundred crowded years of urban theatre seemed to have left almost nothing to hang on to, take off from—And where was one to begin again? Perhaps by looking at our audience again, by trying to understand what experience the audience expected to receive from the theatre.

(Karnad 1994: 11)

It was his encounter with the Natak Companies at the early stage of his life that made a lasting impression on the mind of Girish Karnad. During his formative years, he was exposed to a literary scene where there was a clash between Western and native tradition. It was India of

the fifties and sixties that surfaced two streams of thought in all walks of life—adaptation of new modernistic technique, a legacy of colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of country. His plays like *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Nagamandala* (1988) and *Tale-Danda* (1990) have their origin either in history, myth, legend or folk tale. His use of them as a structure and metaphor in his plays gives new meaning to the past from the vantage of present. Rai (2006: 20) says, “He uses them as a metaphor for the expression of contemporary reality. He looks at the contemporary issues with a new perspective and fresh insight and suggests lines of fruitful exploration for Indian English playwrights”.

Mahesh Dattani, who came on the scene after Girish Karnad, has the privilege of being the first Indian English dramatist to be honoured by the Sahitya Akademi. He is regarded as an authentic voice whose plays are rooted in contemporary urban experience. He, like Girish Karnad, is a playwright, director, an actor, producer and the founder of a theatre group known as the ‘Play Pen’, a performing art group for promoting plays written not only in English but also regional languages. His plays hold mirror to the contemporary Indian society in certain respects. Rai (2006: 21) aptly remarks:

He has the unique capacity to read the rumblings of contemporary urban Indian society and smell the perennial clash between tradition and modernity. He is not interested in polemics but writes frankly



about the oppressed or the marginalized class such as minorities, women, gays, hijaras etc.

If Girish Karnad is the first important pillar of contemporary Indian English drama, Mahesh Dattani is the second one. Khatri says, “Dattani’s plays are in a way sequel to Karnad. Moving forward from history and mythology in Karnad’s plays, Dattani turns to socio-political realities in India today and post-modernist themes like Indian joint family, plight of women and homosexuality” (Khatri 2007: 11). He makes an attempt in his plays to create the space for individual human who struggle for this space in the society.

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) also needs a mention here for his contribution to drama. His language embraced middle class people but it was true to the people he chose to portray. His plays like *Ghashiram Kotwall* (1972), *Silence! the Court is in Session* (1967) and *Sakharam Binder* (1972) deal with suppression of women and satirize the urban middle-class. He has changed the form and pattern of Indian drama with his Marathi plays. He brought the traditional and modern theatre close by demolishing the constraints imposed by the three-act play and by developing flexible and carefully crafted forms. In *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwall* and *Silence! the Court is in Session*, he raises disturbing questions about love, sex, marriage and moral values, and highlights the hollowness of middle class morality. In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the protagonist is an embodiment of political machination and *Sukharam*

shows hollow patriarchal morality. However, *Vultures* (1961) shows people caught in hypocrisy and acute social and mental isolation. Jain (2005: 30-32) remarks:

Tendulkar has, over the years, moved from one social concern to another and has experimented with shock tactics, chorus and folk forms like 'tamasha' to arouse public conscience... [He] has worked with enclosed spaces, with rehearsals as the subject of a play and their sudden detonations which break the boundaries, and overflow into personal conflicts of the characters as in *Silence! The Court is in Session...* [He] has also worked with domestic spaces as in *Sakharam Binder* where moral norms become agents of disruption and the enclosed space no longer remains closed.

Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the century to show the agonies, suffocation and cries of man with a focus on the middle class society. In his plays, he talks about the isolation of man and his confrontation with hostile surroundings. The theme of oppression and violence dominates his plays.

There are other dramatists also who have in one way or the other helped Indian English drama to go ahead in its journey. Notable among them are Badal Sircar (1925-2011), Mohan Rakesh (1925-1972), Gieve Patel (b. 1938), Uma Parameswaran (b. 1938) and Manjula Padmanabhan (b. 1953). Badal Sircar is a prestigious name in the realm of contemporary theatre. His plays like *Evan Inderjit* (1962), *That Other History* (1964) and *There Is No End* (1971) are based on political, social, psychological and existential problems. Diana Mehta's *The Myth Maker*

(1969), *Brides Are Not for Burning* (1979) and *Getting Away with Murder* (2000) present before us the prevailing conditions in Indian society like dowry deaths, sexual abuse, infidelity and insecure relationships. Uma Parameswaran has also been active in theatre in Canada where she teaches. She is the founder of PALT—Performing Art and Literature in India at Winnipeg, Canada and presents weekly shows there. Her play *Sons Must Die* (1998) is a play about Kashmir conflict in 1948. But her reputation as a playwright rests on *Rootless but Green Are The Boulevard Trees* (1987), presenting the conditions of immigrants in Canada.

The influence of Mohan Rakesh on Indian English drama cannot be ignored. His concern as a playwright was to portray the crisis of contemporary man caught in the web of congenial surroundings and persistent threat to human relationships. He wrote primarily in Hindi, but his plays have been translated into English and other regional languages. He is known for his plays like *Asadh Ka Ek Din* (1958), *Lahron Ke Rajhans* (1963) and *Aadhe Adhure* (1969) where he shows us the problem of relations between women and men, ego clashes, divided self, ongoing illusion and nothingness and disintegration of familial relationship. Women dramatists also enriched the Indian drama by projecting the inner world of feminine psyche in the theatre. Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahasweta Devi are notable in this regard. Manjula Padmanabhan's

*Harvest* (1998) which won the first prize in the Onassis International Cultural competition deals with the sale of human organs. Her play *Lights Out* (2000) present the tragic spectacle of the daily rape of women. Besides them Derek Antao (1936-2002) and Poile Sangupta (b. 1948) have contributed to this genre. The other dramatists who deserve reference and critical attention are M.V. Rama Sarma for his eleven plays in *Collected Plays* (1982), Rajindra Paul for *Ashes Above Fire* (1970), Shiv K. Kumar for *The Last Wedding Anniversary* (1975), Derek Antao for *Give Us This Day* and *Our Black Sheep* (1980), Shashi Tharoor for *Twenty Two Months In The Life Of a Dog* and *The Five Dollar Smile* (1990) and R. Raja Roa's *The Wisest Fool On Earth* and *other plays* (1996).

If an Indian dramatist has to succeed, he has to write with a sense of rootedness revealing a true sense of Indian sensibility and has to overcome the temptation of imitating Western models. In this way, Indian English drama can have better future and will be able to hold a space for itself in the corpus of literary writings in the days to come. A survey of Indian English drama reveals that there has been a consistent attempt to produce drama right from the commencement of Indian English literature. However, only few succeeded and most of them failed not only before Independence but also after it. Though Indian English drama made its debut before Indian English Poetry and Novel, it failed to keep pace with

them in quality as well as quantity. There are different reasons that have been attributed to this failure of Indian drama. First there is the lack of theatre. A playwright needs a living theatre to put his work on acid test, evaluate its effect on the audience and to assess its theatrical worth. A large bulk of plays does not get staged in India. Rama Sharma says: “Any play written in India in English has an inherent disadvantage in the sense that it is not very often staged. Stage worthiness being a basic test for a play... most of the plays written in English do not fulfill this requirement” (Sharma 1982: 4). However, the major hurdle in the development of this genre is language. English is not the mother tongue of Indians but it is the second language. Natural conversation of Indian actors speaking in English on stage is bound to sound artificial. In the process of translation, the original form is misinterpreted. But the problem lies not only with translation but also the inadequacy of the English language to express temperaments, sensibilities and realities which are essentially Indian. The paucity of this drama is also due to the inability of the Indian playwrights to draw up on the rich and varied Indian dramatic traditions and make use of the rich plethora of Indian myths and history.

It is pertinent to mention here that playwrights like Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad have made valuable contributions to the development and growth of the

Indian drama in English. They enlivened it by drawing the source of their plays either from present socio-political set-up or Indian history, myths, folk-tales and epics. Girish Karnad is most important among them. He has turned to the Indian past in order to tackle the contemporary issues. He looks at the past from the vantage of present and sees the relevance of past for the present. His contribution to Indian English drama will be discussed in detail in the chapter that follows.

## **Chapter III**

### **Girish Karnad as a Dramatist**

Girish Karnad (b. 1938), a recipient of Jnanpith award and a bilingual writer, is a living legend in the arena of contemporary Indian English Drama. He was born in Matheran, a town near Bombay. He belongs to the formative generation of Indian playwrights who came to maturity in the two decades following Independence and collectively reshaped the Indian theatre as a major national institution in the latter part of the twentieth century. He was brought up at Sirsi, a Kannad speaking region, near Karwar where he learned the Kannad language and was exposed to various dramatic performances. This provided him an opportunity to watch and experience the theatre entertainments provided by theatre groups like ‘Yakshagana’ and ‘Bayalata’. Remembering those days, he says in an interview:

It may have something to do with the fact that in the small town of Sirsi, where I grew up, strolling groups of players, Natak companies would come, set up a stage, present a few plays over a couple of months and moved on. My parents were addicted to these plays. That was in the late 1940s. By the 1950s, films had more or less finished of this kind of theatre, though some Mandals still survive in North Karnataka in a very degenerate state. But in those days they were good or at least I was young and thought so. I loved going to see them and the magic has stayed with me.

(Karnad 1995: 360)

During his formative years, he went through diverse influences that went a long way into shaping his dramatic taste and genius. The earliest influence was that of the ‘Natak Company’ that was in vogue in Sirsi. The ‘Yakshagana’ plays which he used to see with the servants also influenced him. In his reaction to two types of theatres, he says:

In my childhood, in a small town in Karnataka, I was exposed to two theatre forms that seemed to represent irreconcilably different worlds. Father took the entire family to see plays staged by troupes of professional actors called Natak companies which toured the countryside throughout the year. The plays were staged in semi permanent structures on proscenium stages, with wings and drop curtains, and were illuminated by patromax lamps.

(Karnad 2007: 1)

Karnad was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between Western and native tradition. It was India of the fifties and the sixties that surfaced two streams of the thought in all walks of life—adaptation of new modernistic technique, a legacy of colonial rule and an adherence to the rich cultural past of the country. In his introduction to *Three Plays*, he says:

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the



historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries.

(Karnad 2007: 1)

When he was pursuing his master's degree from Bombay University, he won the Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford University. During his university days in Bombay, he visited Prithvi Theatre to see Strindberg's *Miss Julie* which was staged with the direction of Ebrahim Alkazi. This made an indelible impact on his creative genius. During his stay at Magdalen College at Oxford University, he felt immensely interested in art and culture. He saw many brilliant productions of Shakespeare's plays, Bernard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Grotowski and Beckett. His reading of existentialism in the plays of Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus and Sartre helped him to frame the corpus of his plays.

Karnad's dramatic repertoire includes *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Tale-Danda* (1990), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Naga-Mandala* (1990), *The Fire and The Rain* (1994), *The Dreams Of Tipu Sultan* (1997), *Bali-The Sacrifice* (2002), *Frightened Jasmine* (1977), *Flowers* (2004) and *Broken Images* (2004). His dramatic archetypes are shaped on the Yakshagana and Bayalata conventions—regional sources—and forms of *Natyashastra*—traditional source. In this context, Babu says, “Karnad makes use of myth, folktale, legend and history. He also exploits the elements of Yakshagana, Bayalata and Folk Theatre in *Hayavadana*”

(Babu 1999: 80). The themes of his plays are taken from the labyrinth of vast multicultural subcontinent of India and the dense thicket of Indian psychology, sociology and anthropology. He draws the source of his plays from myths, legends, folktales, history and his contemporary reality. He reworks with these sources and makes them almost alive and true. In this context, Nayak (2011: 5) says, “[His] plays have Indian settings and potential thematic values based on Indian philosophy, sociology, religious beliefs, psychology, historical developments, myths legends and folk-lore”.

Karnad gives subjective interpretation to the events and inscribes the socio-cultural, philosophical, political and empirical specificities. He presents Indian culture and tradition in his plays, and combines the worlds of reality, fantasy and universality of human knowledge. In this context, Mukherjee (2006: 17) aptly says, “In Karnad’s plays, the worlds of reality and fantasy or illusion meet in such a way that poetry is created”. He always draws the wealth of his dramatic knowledge from the past, weaves them in the present and makes them desirable for the future. Nayak (2011: 6) remarks, “Karnad has the association of sensibility with the indispensable past, immediate present and impending future. In his modernist approach, he makes them his repertoire in contemporary discourse”. His dramatic imagination is highly charged with humanistic

thought, secularist ideology, nationalist commitment, cosmopolitan spirit, traditionalist approach and modernist hypothesis.

In his plays, Karnad exemplifies the transformative practices of his generation and carves out a distinctive place for himself with respect to the subject matter, dramatic style and authorial identity. His plays are meaningful texts with important qualities in varying degrees, approaches, and are serious commentaries on life and society. His plays express his deep commitment to Indian Drama in terms of the text and performance. An objective analysis of his plays reveals that they cover “philosophical and religious beliefs, historical developments in Indian sociological settings, and its cultural transformation” (Nayak 2011: 6).

Myths play an important role in Indian socio-cultural dynamics. They serve as a kind of collective unconscious which is conveyed through oral and performative traditions. This helps in the teaching and transmission of cultural values to the subsequent generations. In his representation of myths, Karnad telescopes on to those selected moments of cultural and historical crisis when individual choices had to confront the burden of culture and the way those choices effected socio-cultural transformation. Babu (1999: 238) rightly points out that in Karnad’s plays, “[M]yths, legends and folk forms function as a kind of cultural anesthesia and they have been used for introducing and eliminating, in our racial unconsciousness, cultural pathogens such as caste and gender

distinctions and religious fanaticism”. Karnad re-contextualizes myths in order to provide analogues for contemporary times when similar choices require to be made by an individual or community. His plays have an Indian sensibility and style. Nayak (2011: 7) says that Karnad is “microscopic to the values and morals in the myths, favourable to the folklores for their relevance and holistic about the historical hassles”. While reworking with the myths, he reveals the human mind when it failed to distinguish between the fact and fiction, virtues and vices, and warns the future generations to remain cautious and careful in human relationships, personal whims and temperament, obsessions and ambitions.

Myths demonstrate cultural tradition, fantastic events with no proof and enhance spiritual insight and spirituality helps to clean negativity in human mind. Indian myths not only make the Indians bound to their family, linguistic, faith and ethnic communities but also connect them to the past for providing moral values and emotional and social security. Karnad recreates some mythical stories of his choice with universal overtones and operates them in almost all spheres of life. These myths envision him the welfare of human beings and harmony in the society. As myths are the collective unconsciousness, their significance never dies. As a conscious dramatist, Karnad prefers myths, parables, legends and folktales because they provide immense scope for the life. He presents

myths in human conditions and links the present with the archetypal.

Maya (2001:68) rightly remarks:

Karnad links the past and the present, the archetype and the real. Issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past which lend new meanings and insights through analogy, reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. They form an integral part of the culture consciousness of the land, with their associative layers of meaning, their timelessness and relevance to contemporary issues.

Karnad's refuge in myths enables him to present the absurdity of life, conflicts, and individual's eternal struggle to achieve perfection. His plays that are based on myths include *Yayati* (1961), *The Fire and The Rain* (1995) and *Bali-The Sacrifice* (2004).

*Yayati* is Karnad's landmark contribution to Indian Drama. It is his first play in which he delineates the pervasive philosophy of existentialism. He takes the myth of Yayati from the *Mahabharata* and presents the "conflicting philosophies, physical, emotional and psychological repercussions of his characters in an attempt to integrate his creative enterprise on duty and responsibility, existence and essence, and the ethics and aesthetics" (Nayak 2011: 28). He wrote this play, when he was moving to England to study at Oxford University. In an interview, he says:

During the weeks of preparation for my departure to England...I found myself writing a play. This was *Yayati*. Though I had trained myself to

write in English, I found myself writing the play in Kannad. The story of king Yayati is from the ‘Adiparva’ of *Mahabharata*. At the prime of his life, the king is cursed with senility because of moral transgression. Concerned only with himself, he pleads with his sons to exchange their youth with him and only the youngest son Puru agrees...I reworked the script during my trip to England.

(Mukherjee 2006: 30-31)

During his days in England, he felt alienated from his family, people and the story of Yayati helped him to relax himself from this stressful situation. He says in an interview:

I saw it as a way to escape the stressful situation. But when I recall the time, I’m amazed how closely the myth reflected my anxieties and uncertainties, and my resentment at all who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future. But it did serve me as an outlet for my doubts and provide me with a set of values.

(Mukherjee 2006: 31)

Karnad has given this traditional tale of King Yayati a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of the life today. He makes some alterations by introducing Chitrlekha as the wife of Puru. When Puru becomes old and losses vigor and vitality, his wife cannot bear this loss and commits suicide. Chitrlekha’s protest in the play for this exchange of youth is an attack on male chauvinism and patriarchy. Yayati stands for modern man overwhelmed by worldly desires, sensual pleasure, and irresponsible exercise of power and utter forgetfulness of the everlasting values of life. Yayati recognizes the horror of his own life and takes his moral responsibility. Murthy says,

“*Yayati* is a self-consciously existentialist drama on the theme of responsibility” (Online). This play also deals with the issues of class and caste division. Issue of women subordination gets highlighted in the *Yayati*’s treatment of the women in the play. Raju aptly remarks:

Karnad makes *Yayati* confront the horrifying consequences of not being able to relinquish desire; and through the other characters he highlights the issues of class/caste and gender coiled within a web of desire.

(Raju 2006: 81)

Girish Karnad’s *The Fire and the Rain* (1995) is based on the myth of *Yayakri* taken from the *Mahabharata*. It is a play full of symbolical and allegorical overtones and is a dramatic representation of quintessential conflict between good and evil. Dharwadker (2006: xvi-xvii) remarks that in this play, “Karnad reimagines the world of Hindu antiquity and constructs a story of passion, loss, and sacrifice in the context of Vedic ritual, spiritual discipline (*tapasya*), social and ethical differences between human agents”. The play presents the celebration of fire with Vedic rituals for the appeasement of the divine and peace and happiness of the mankind. But, Karnad also associates the aesthetics of Brahmanism with the mind-game of egocentricism. In the play, fire-sacrifice is taken as a central metaphor to underline activities like academic study, love-making, reading epics and marriage. Karnad develops the story of the play from the original myth with some

digressions and presents society's age-old attitude towards women and low castes. It is also based on the theme of responsibility. Girish Karnad's success lies in discussing modern problems with the help of an ancient myth.

Karnad's *Bali-The Sacrifice* (2009) is an ethical thesis that questions the validity of Rigvedic practice of animal sacrifice in Hindu rituals. In this play, he presents India's conflicting religious and cultural ethos. He has selected the thirteen century Kannad epic *Yashodhara Charite* and offers a fresh perspective on social, moral and religious structure of an individual's faith. He also examines an individual's private involvements in love, sex and passion for the gratification of his public life. In an interview, he says:

*Bali* worried and excited me...It deals with the idea that violence is pervasive, lying just beneath the surface of our everyday behavior and is often masked by a conscious effort. It also posits that human thought, intention and action are interlinked. It debates the Jain notion that intended violence is as condemnable as the action itself...The play debates the conflict of faith.

(Mukherjee 2006: 49)

The play presents a great philosophical thinking on the Indian tradition and ideological contents about values, moral conflicts and dilemmas. The play becomes a sight for struggle between personal authority and popular culture of cruelty. Nayak (2011: 79) aptly says, "Karnad uses the context of the play with a hint at a positivist and



exclusivist possibility of all ideologies and necessary human bonds in human relationships”. Karnad negotiates between the culture and need based ideology in their functional relevance and philosophical thinking.

As mentioned earlier, Karnad also draws the source of his plays from folktales and gives new meaning to these tales to suit his purpose. Folktales deal with the natural and cultural phenomenon of a society. It establishes an oral tradition to make us understand the treasures of culture. Karnad’s use of folktales is based on traditional beliefs and practices and they carry the answers to the contemporary socio-cultural problems and inequalities in terms of caste, class, gender and exploitation. They also establish the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethnic, cultural and various other aspects of life. In this context, Dharwadker (2006: xxix) says:

The ideology of urban folk drama thus manifests itself most consciously in the treatment of femininity, sexual desire and power: although the challenge to patriarchy is not absolute, women in folk drama find the means of exercising an ambivalent freedom within its constraints, unlike their urban counterparts.

Karnad reworks with the folktales which is a new trend in Indian English Drama. In the presentation of tradition and conventions in India, he revitalizes them for the better purpose of life.

In *Hayavadana* (1971), *Naga-Mandala* (1985) and *Flowers: A Dramatic Monologue* (2004), Karnad has reworked with the folktales of

Karnataka with new meanings and contemporary relevance. As he transforms the oral tradition into the presentational form on stage, he popularizes them with the narration of human predicament. The plot of *Hayavadana* is from Somdeva's *Brihat Katha-Saritasagar*. Karnad has also borrowed from Thomas Man's retelling of the same story in the *Transposed Heads* in order to develop the sub-plot of the play. It is the theme of incompleteness and an individual's yearning for completeness and perfection that pervades the play. It is this yearning that makes people restless in this ordinary existence and makes them reach out for extraordinary things. In the main plot, there is the story of the transposition of heads and in the sub-plot is the story of Hayavadana ('Haya' means horse and 'Vadana' means face) which means a man with the face of a horse.

*Hayavadana* poses a problem of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. The 'non-naturalistic' form used by Karnad in this play takes him close to Brecht's 'Epic Theatre', as both make extensive use of songs and music. In both these forms, there is linear and loose plot construction avoiding climax and revelation. In Karnad's play, actors wear masks and action is presented largely through 'miming'. This helps in making the audience think about the problem in a more detached manner. It helps us to ponder over, and respond critically to what is being presented on the stage rather than taken over by emotions. Karnad has

himself acknowledged the influence of Western writers, and in terms of form, his debt to Brecht's 'Epic Theatre' cannot be denied. In an interview, he says:

I read the basic Western canon- the Greek plays, Shakespeare, Shaw, Brecht, Sartre, Camus. Brecht's technique influenced me a great deal in the earlier years. I remember *Life of Galileo* and *The Good Woman of Szechwan* vividly.

(Mukherjee 2006: 34-35)

It is important to mention that Karnad does not draw wholly from 'Epic Theatre'. Devices used by Brecht are also present in Indian 'Folk Theatre' tradition, from which Karnad draws heavily to universalize his themes.

The theme of the *Hayavadana* has socio-cultural aspect as well as metaphysical one. Raykar (1999: 177) aptly says, "To me, the theme of the play has two aspects, a socio-cultural aspect and a metaphysical one. At both levels it shows the conflict between two polarities (namely Apollonian and Dionysian) as the vital truth of human existence". This play can also be studied from post-colonial point of view. The predicament of Padmini, the female protagonist, can easily be compared with the predicament of a 'Modern' woman. Karnad has described various problems faced by women and questions social conventions.

*Naga-Mandala* is also one of the best plays of Girish Karnad. This play depicts the man-woman relationship in their conjugal life. Karnad

came to know about the two stories while going through A. K. Ramanujan's works on folktales. The first one is the traditional tale of a cobra turning into a man at night and visiting a married woman, and the second is based on the popular belief that a night long vigil in a temple can ward off death. In this context, Karnad says in an interview:

*Naga-Mandala* combines two folktales. The framing story describes the gathering of the flames in a dilapidated temple after the lamps in the village homes have been extinguished. The gossip of the flames is overheard by a playwright who is condemned to die unless he can keep awake the whole night. The story the playwright hears is about a woman, her husband and her snake-lover. When I heard the folktales, I was captivated...

(Mukherjee 2006: 42)

*Naga-Mandala* is a powerful portrait of the agony and anguish faced by both men and women in their development into adult roles. It also deals with social adjustment of an individual in a society where he is given little space for self development and independence as a being. Gupta (1999: 250) rightly says, "It is remarkable achievement of Karnad's play that he adapts this 'man-oriented' folk tale in such a manner that it becomes the representation of the experience of man and woman in the psychologically transitory phase".

The male conception of keeping full control over the body, sexuality and virtue of woman through the institutions of family and values like chastity are mocked in the play. Rani, the female protagonist

in the *Naga-Mandala*, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband in two different roles—as a stranger during the day and as a lover at the night. In this play, Girish Karnad cuts below the surface to reveal the burning core of mental or spiritual reality. The main concern of the playwright here becomes centered on human beings in combination, interacting, entering into one another's lives and becoming part of one another. Girish Karnad rightly says, "The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literary stand on their head" (Karnad 2007: 14). In this play, too, he has used folk theatre conventions like the chorus, the masks, and the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds, to present alternative points of view or alternative attitudes to the central problem.

*Flowers: A Dramatic Monologue* (2004) is Karnad's first dramatic monologue written in English. Drawing a traditional world of folktales in the play, Karnad presents the story of a very introspective, chauvinistic and confessional priest who is marked for his endearing innocence and love for his shriveled wife and a sensuous courtesan. The play is based on the legend of Veeranna who belongs to the Chitradurga region of Karnataka. In the play, we see that the married priest has been

passionately in love with a mistress to whom he takes the offerings from the temple after the evening prayers. In this play, Karnad delves into the priest's mind which oscillates between "the rational and the intuitive, the empirical and the transcendental" (Nayak 2011: 126). He recasts the legend as a conflict between religious devotion and erotic passion. Karnad mingles the spiritual with the carnal and confirms the power of the priests worship. In this context, Dharwadker (2006: xxxii) says:

Karnad... recasts the legend as a conflict between religious devotion and erotic love, undergirded by the priest's guilt at his daily betrayal of his wife... The miracle of Shivalinga confirms the power of the priests worship and marks him as one of the chosen, but it also ends his life.

The priest's sensual consuming of the courtesan's body leads him to his self- discovery. His mental landscape is marked with the imagination of sacred and profane, which exists as parallels, not as continuities or interactive practices. Karnad says that the play expresses "respect for those who have faith. It is also the story of self-realization and penance" (Mukherjee 2006: 54). One can say that in Karnad's plays the folktales are not mere gossips of the common and illiterate masses but they make audience aware of India's tradition and culture. This dramatic monologue opens several other layers of meanings and raises "questions about the nature of power and belief and about the relationship between power and sacrifice" (Jain 2007: 351).

Karnad has not restricted himself to the Indian myths and folktales only but has also turned to the Indian history as the source of his plays. History has fascinated his creative imagination. It provides him the elements of psychoanalysis, political praxis and revolutionary concepts. In historical plays, he suspends the disbelief of the readers and generates a new fondness for the protagonists in it. He uncovers and discovers the contemporary consciousness in the history. He does not take history as an autonomous entity. As a lover of historical personalities in Indian history, he has projected their whims, temperaments, eccentricities, objectives, peculiarities and also their popularity. He perceives history not only full of the events but also full of ethics, discourse, universal laws and ideologies—as tools to liberate mankind from bondages, sufferings and perils. In this context, Nayak (2011: 139-140) says, “Awakening his dead protagonists from their fossilized selves, he reverberates them with his ideological genomes in post-colonial speculations”. One can say that he scrutinizes his protagonists, their political, diplomatic, psychoanalytical and revolutionary concepts as an objective and transcendent commentator. Analyzing some periods in the Indian history and the prevalent situation at that time, he makes us understand its importance and relevance in the present. *Tughlaq* (1972), *Tale-Danda* (1993) and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2004) are the plays in which history has been examined.

*Tale-Danda* is a historical play and depicts the conditions of north Karnataka in the twelfth century. Karnad has projected a socio-religious movement during the time of Kalachurya dynasty. This movement was stated by sharanas—devotees of Lord Shiva—who opposed idolatry, temple worship and caste system in Hinduism. In an interview, Karnad says:

The play is inspired by the life and work of Basavana, a revolutionary poet-saint who lived in the city of Kalyan in Karnataka in the twelfth century. He had got together a remarkable group of poets, reformers, philosophers who created a courageous age of enquiry and social reform... opposed the caste system, condemned idolatry and temple worship, believed in the equality of sexes, in the progress of human enterprise. They attracted the wrath of the orthodox and the conservative people and the entire movement of the sharanas ended in chaos and terror in 1168.

(Mukherjee 2006: 45)

Karnad retrospects the history in its sordid prospect and presents the mystery of caste and religion in Indian social dynamics. The play has been written in the backdrop of growing extremism and presents an individual's attempt towards communal integration during an epoch of violence. In an interview, Karnad says:

I wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when 'Mandir' and 'Mandal' movements were beginning to show how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horrors of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered.

(Quoted in Nayak 2011: 141-142)



Karnad has not only shown the inter-religious conflicts but has given vent to the intra-religious conflicts as well. He has not prescribed any magical balm for the ills and evils of the society but makes us understand that the parentage, caste and religion are not the right canons to judge a man in a multicultural society like India. Shukla (2006: 290) rightly says, “The major theme of Karnad’s *Tale-Danda* is that of deconstruction of caste and religion to arrive at its real, proper meaning and to restructure the same for the benefit of the society and the country”.

Karnad’s *Tughlaq* (1972) is a historical play that has been acclaimed by critics for its wide depth and range. It is a rich work of art and lends itself to various interpretations at different levels. Nayak (2011: 139) rightly says, “For [Karnad] history is no longer a static background for his play; rather it is timeless, alive and absurd in its entirety”. In this play, Karnad explores the paradox of Mohammad bin Tughlaq, the medieval Muslim Sultan, whose reign is considered to be one of the biggest failures of the Indian history. It is not an ordinary chronicle play, but a very imaginative reconstruction of some of the most significant events in the life of a great king. It has the historicity of fact and textuality of history in its Postmodern and neohistoricist discourses. In this play, Karnad evolves macro-historical schemes like the power affection, social relations, political reasons and conservative thoughts in its structure. Attention has been paid to the political theme of the play as the play

reflects the political disillusionment of India after Independence. Karnad says:

In a sense, the play reflects the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of Independent India: The gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for Independence, and coming to terms with cynicism and real politik.

(Karnad 2007: 7)

The play also has the theme of power-politics and communalism. It is the reprocessing of the past with emphasis on the political and social needs of the present.

The language of the play is simple and precise. Through careful choice of characters and situations, Karnad attempts to make his dialogue realistic and highly effective. In this play, he has turned to the Natak Tradition which demands a succession of alternating ‘Shallow’ and ‘Deep’ scenes. The shallow scenes were played in the foreground of the stage with a painted curtain—normally depicting a street—as the backdrop. These scenes were reserved for the ‘lower class’ characters with prominence given to comedy. The main aim was to engage audience with the deep scenes which showed interiors of palaces, royal parks and other such visually opulent scenes. In an interview, Karnad says, “I deliberately chose a Natak Company form for a historical drama... the “shallow” scenes serve as the link scenes of comic exchange, while the

opulent settings for “deep” scenes are being prepared” (Mukherjee 2006: 36).

*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2004) is based on the history of the eighteenth century India. The play presents the status of Tipu, his psychology and the struggle for peace. It also shows his strategic resistance when the princely states were struggling for their individual hegemony, and the British were consolidating their empire. Karnad has analyzed history from Postcolonial perspective and has presented his ideological polemics and objective point of view into the then socio-political paradigms. His aim seems to highlight Tipu’s visionary zeal, political strategies, battle field maneuvers, modernizing impulses and the populist trade and commerce policies. In this context, Dharwadker (2006: xxiv) says:

Karnad also casts his protagonist in multiple and contradictory roles—as a beloved ruler, legendary warrior, loving father, and visionary dreamer, but also as the Machiavellian schemer who plots with the French against the English, the defeated soldier who enters into humiliating treaties with the enemy, and the gullible commander who is eventually betrayed by his own side.

Karnad has shown the fearless warrior as the dreamer of peace and progress who yoked ethics with economics. He adds human dimensions to the figure painted into the fading murals of history. In this context, Nayak (2011: 183) says, “The play appears to be a historical teleology in colonial taxonomy. Karnad has attempted his best to defend Tipu’s

marginalized status in his patriotic past and needy present in a post-colonial perspective dousing all colonial bias”. Karnad was inspired by Tipu’s secret dairy in which he had recorded his dreams and also by folk ballads on him in Karnataka.

The thought of writing a play on Tipu Sultan came to Karnad when he was commissioned by BBC for a play in 1996, in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of India’s independence. This play is a complex poetic rehabilitation of Tipu Sultan. In the portrayal of this legendary Sultan, Karnad presents India’s firm colonial resistance and crisis in polity due to its internal dissensions and presence of powerful alien adversary.

Apart from myths, folktales and history, Karnad has also concentrated his dramatic imagination on modern man’s Postcolonial situation and existential anxiety. He projects life and society in the contemporary world which suffer from internal vacuity and external vanities. *A Heap of Broken Images* (2005) and *Wedding Album* (2009) have their grounding in the “technology-affected and culture-infected Indian society” (Nayak 2011: 187). The former is a dramatic monologue and the latter is a one-act play of nine scenes. *A Heap of Broken Images*, like many of Karnad’s plays, was first produced and then published. The play presents a complex debate on technology and language. Karnad makes us understand that language is the sign that identifies a person,

defines a culture and unites a society or nation. The play also presents Karnad's impression about the tremendous technological advances. He wants to point out that language usually speaks man but now technology speaks man. Technology plays the role of a character in this play. In an interview, he says:

When I returned to Bangalore in early 2009, I realized the extent to which technology pervaded and affected our lives. To me technology was not depressing at all. This was the age of image. We need to understand its aesthetics and use it.

(Mukherjee 2006: 53)

The title of the play has been taken from T. S. Eliot's poem the *Wasteland*. Karnad seems to be pointing towards a similar socio-psychological break down in human communication and relationships in the face of overpowering ambition and greed. The play is exceptional for its use of technology and explores the psychological and ideological dimensions of the characters. Mukherjee aptly says:

A consistent preoccupation of Karnad has been to explore the hidden depths of human mind. Karnad's plays invariably demonstrate the playwright's enduring interest in and sensitive inquiry in to the causality of human behavior.

(Quoted in Jha 2009: 159)

Karnad's *Wedding Album* (2009) is a landmark production and presents a Brahmin family where parents are worried for the marriage of their daughter and son in an arranged way. Karnad presents the

conflicting situation that arises due to the different ideologies of the parents and their children. He has given a peep into the modern Indian society and makes us aware about the horrors of Postcolonial and Postmodern hybridity. The play gives a clear picture of the ‘self’ and ‘psyche’ of the family members and exposes the glory and gravity of secrets in middle class life. It shows a tussle between the traditional values and modern values, as younger generation is buffeted by aspiration to easy prosperity, dreams and phantasms. Nayak (2011: 207) aptly says, “[T]he playwright presents marriage, culture, tradition and Hindu values which are affected by the postcolonial dynamics”.

*Wedding Album* appears a family drama which demonstrates the anxieties, worries, ambition and prospects of love and marriage in middle class people. The play shows fragmented characters and presents crises in their lives because of the influence of materialism, modification of culture and technology. It shows the loss of cultural and moral values which create turmoil in life. The play also shows the evil impact of multimedia on the younger generation who in the name of career prospect and material success get attracted to its evil designs. The playwright as a great custodian of values, culture, ethics and tradition does not seem to like the entry of the multimedia in an individual’s private matters. All this gets reflected through Vidula—a female character in the play—who visits internet café with the plea of playing video games and listening to the

sermons of Swami Ananga Nath. But what she does there is to chat with the unknown boys in order to masturbate her feminine energy.

Girish Karnad's contribution to Indian English Drama is incredible. He enunciates his ideas from various sources and writes plays with higher ideals and philosophy. He analyses the state of mind of his protagonists and makes a deep study of human behavior, social consciousness and psychological effects. Karnad is deeply rooted in Indian culture and tradition. Through his creative imagination, he explores the treaded and untreaded floors of human psyche. He tries to rejuvenate the contemporary life in his choice of themes, mingling of contemporary politics and history, and ancient myths and contemporary reality. He valorizes past in his plays and makes it a powerful tool for the expression of his ideas. The past plays an important role in his plays and enrich our knowledge about the cultural past of India. His perception of past needs an attention, as it has the maneuverable effect in the context of affecting the future. Nayak (2011: 228) aptly says:

Dramatizing the issues, incidents and events in the archetypes of myth, folklore and history he not only nurtures his nostalgia for it but values it much. For him present appears to be boring, disgusting and amnesic, and the past appears lively.

In *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda* and *Bali-The Sacrifice*, Karnad reinterprets the past and glorifies the rich tradition and cultural heritage of India. Karnad's retrieval of culture and enrichment of our knowledge of

the past in the above mentioned plays is worthwhile and a detailed study of these plays from this perspective will be made in what follows.



## Chapter IV

### ***Tughlaq: Re-enacting History***

Linda Hutcheon is of the view that Postmodernism and Postcolonialism are alike because both undertake a dialogue with history. She observes that Postmodernism “questions, rather than confirms, the process of history... [and] this is where it overlaps significantly with the post-colonial” (Quoted in Dharwadker 2006: 218). In Postcolonial theory, the Postmodern critique of textualized history has been used to understand the epistemological and cultural effects of European dominance over non-European societies in the post-Renaissance period. With the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and launching of the ‘Subaltern Studies’, the ‘Postcolonial Studies’ has not only questioned the autonomous status of history but also “stressed the complicity between the historical discourse and the colonialist strategies of cultural domination and self-legitimation because the production of the ‘official’ histories in the colonial world is almost the prerogative of the colonizer” (Dharwadker 2006: 219). Postcolonial writers have tried to reshape their history by using history as a narrative in their writings. This fictionalized representation of history always stands in a determinable ideological relationship to the textualized history—confirming, repudiating or

radically reshaping its message. This historical narrative can be regarded as an alternative form of figural representation.

We are aware of the fact that, like other colonial countries, India, too, was under the British colonial rule for more than a century. During this period, its inhabitants lost their voices and wishes. They were subjected to harsh treatment; brutalities of that period are fresh in the collective memory of Indian people even today. Their actual history was buried underground and it was the ideologically manipulated and power-centered history that got recorded at that time. After India's Independence in 1947, Indian people breathed a sigh of relief. The Indian intellectuals found a need to reshape their past and to link themselves to their pre-colonial past. The biggest challenge before them (intellectual people) was to connect the Postcolonial period with the pre-colonial one. They began a search for cultural roots which had been polluted during this imperial rule. In the mean time, various writers came on the scene and began to frame their writings. They began to foreground Indian culture in their writings by drawing from the rich plethora of Indian past. We see some important figures like Raja Roa, R. K. Narayan, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Sarojini Naidu and various other writers who enriched Indian English literature with their literary output.

In the genre of drama, too, dramatists came up with their plays—as has been discussed in detail in Chapter II of this dissertation—which are

now an important part of our literary tradition. Most of them have used Indian myths, folktales and history as the source of their plays. Girish Karnad is also one among them. He has located most of his plays in Indian history, myths and folktales; only few of them have been placed in contemporary reality. In *Tughlaq*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* and *Tale-Danda* history has been used and interpreted to suit his purpose. In the first two plays, history has been contested but in *Tale-Danda* history has been reinterpreted to portray the picture of the Indian culture.

Indian history is divided into three periods—Ancient, Medieval and Modern. In *Tughlaq*, Karnad goes back to the second phase of the Indian history because Tughlaq's reign also comes under this phase. In his portrayal of Tughlaq, Karnad has depicted the last five years of his reign. He came to know about Tughlaq, when he was going through the *Tarikh-Firoz Shahi (The History of Firoz Shah Tughlaq 1891)* of Tughlaq's court historian, Zia-ud-din Barani. In an interview, Karnad says:

When I read about Mohammed bin Tughlaq, I was fascinated. How marvelous this was, I thought. Tughlaq was a brilliant individual yet is regarded as one of the biggest failures. He tried to introduce policies that seemed today to be farsighted to the point of genius, but which earned him the nick name "Mohammed the mad" then. He ended his career in bloodshed and chaos.

(Mukherjee 2006: 35)

The history of Mohammed bin Tughlaq is primarily the product of medieval Muslim and colonial British tradition of historiography whose ways of ideological implications have only recently begun to be scrutinized. Before the British came to India, there were Muslim kings who ruled over India for many centuries. When one turns to Indian history, one comes to know that there had been various wars among the kings and their kith and kin for the sake of kingship. From 1206-1526, there were five dynasties—the Slaves, the Khaljis, the Tughlaqs, the Sayyids and the Lodis—that ruled India. The British seem to have used these wars a tool to denigrate the Indian culture. Orientalist historians have treated the turmoil of the Muslim rule in India in such a manner which shows the necessity and superiority of the British colonial rule. Henry Elliot, in his preface to the *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India* says, “Though the intrinsic value of these works may be small... they will make our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages occurring to them under the mildness and equity of our rule...” (Quoted in Dharwadker 2006: 105). Tughlaq has also been considered as an oriental despot by Vincent Smith, who observes that it is “astonishing that such a monster should have retained power for twenty six years, and then have died in his bed” (Smith 1914: 254).

Medieval Muslim historian—Zia-Ud-din Barani—defines “history as a form of knowledge essential for understanding the silent aspects of

Islam and aims to educate Muslim Sultans in their duty to their faith” (Quoted in Dharwadker 2006: 248). In this frame work, Tughlaq became a repulsive subject because of his disregard for Quran in dealing with both Hindus and Muslims alike and his attempts to limit Islam’s influence in the political and judicial spheres of India. Barani has criticized Tughlaq for not following the principles of Islam properly; he has described him a ruthless and ambitious king. He has also lampooned him for establishing brutal laws and taking ridiculous decisions in order to keep himself in power. This gets reflected through two well-known Indian modern historians, Habib and Nizami (1970: 493) who say, “Barani makes a broad observation to the effect that [Mohammed bin Tughlaq] had lost implicit faith in ‘the revealed word’ and the traditions of the prophet”.

Karnad has tried to present an alternative history than the one propounded by Orientalists and ‘official’ historiographers alike. Retrieval of cultural past that may have a significant connection with the present—themes of communalism and power politics—and its treatment in the plays make it an explicit commentary on some of the vital and problematic issues of contemporary India. Karnad does not seem to accept the European view of Indian history. He has tried to rectify gaps, omissions and silences of the national historiography. For instance, paradigmatic qualities as a historical fiction and cultural vitality in *Tughlaq* lie in fact that it retrieves and makes current the relatively

unfamiliar phase of Islamic imperialism in India, known as the Sultanate Period, which brought the classical Hinduism to its decisive end and introduced Islam as a dominant political and cultural force on the subcontinent. However, in the collective memory of contemporary Indians, it has been relegated to a marginal position because of the strong impact of the Moghul period and the British imperialism.

In Karnad's portrayal of Tughlaq, we come across different interpretations of the events in the reign of Tughlaq. The play opens in 1327 AD, the time when Tughlaq (a Muslim ruler) was ruling over India. The image of monarchical rule in India is recreated as the location of the first scene in "the yard in front of the Chief Court of justice in Delhi" (Karnad 2006a: 5) and India's religious plurality is reflected in a "crowd of citizens—mostly Muslims—with a few Hindus here and there" (Karnad 2006a: 5). In the very first scene, we see Tughlaq inviting his subjects to celebrate a new system, where justice works "without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed" (Karnad 2006a: 7).

Karnad has tried to provide justice to this historical figure by making us understand that Tughlaq tried to rule in an impartial manner but the people around him failed to understand his best intentions. In the opening scene of the play, a young man says:

The country's perfectly in safe hands—safer than any you've seen before... what's the use of sultans who didn't allow a subject within a mile's distance? This king now, he isn't afraid to be human.

Barani's critique of Tughlaq as an anti-religious king is refuted by Karnad. Karnad portrays him as a deeply religious person who had given orders for regular prayers. One of Tughlaq's subjects says to another:

[H]ow often did you pray before he came to the throne?... Not even once a week, I bet. Now you pray five times a day because that's the law and if you break it, you'll have the officers on your neck. Can you mention one earlier Sultan in whose time people read the Koran in the streets like now?

(5-6)

This gets substantiated also in the discussion among his treacherous fellows who wanted to kill him during the prayer time. Ratan Sing suggests them to kill him during prayer because "the sultan ...is a fanatic about prayer. He has made it compulsory for every Muslim to pray five times a day" (43).

Karnad has portrayed Tughlaq as a secular ruler who abolished *jiziya*—a tax on Hindus who lived under the Muslim rule—for the betterment of his people and kingdom. But, he and his secular ideas are not understood by the people around him because his ideals are far beyond the comprehension of his contemporaries and much in advance of his time. His concept of religious tolerance seems foolish to the Muslims and his very motives are not free from suspicion to the Hindus. The Hindus, too, like their Muslim counterparts, behaved as "ungrateful wretch[es]" (6). As one of his Hindu subjects says:

We didn't want an exemption! Look, when a sultan kicks me in the teeth and says, 'pay up, you Hindu dog', I'm happy. I know I am safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, 'I know you are a Hindu, but you are also a human being'—well, that makes me nervous.

(6)

This hints at the lurking suspension between the Hindus and Muslims during that period. The abolition of *jiziya* shows Tughlaq's religiosity and his attempts "for Hindu-Muslim unity and that he has no partiality for any particular community" (Sinha 2006: 56-57). His sense of justice is evident from the announcement that Vishnu Prasad—a Brahmin—"should receive a grant of five hundred silver dinars from the state treasury... and in addition to that...a post in the civil service to ensure him a regular and adequate income" (6-7). This person had filed a case against the Sultan for the misbehaviour of his officers who had taken his land illegally. During his reign, Tughlaq took a decision to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. About this shifting of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, Husain writes:

[It] brought destruction to the capital city and misfortune to the upper classes, as well as decline of select and distinguished people... He devastated Delhi so much that in its inhabited areas, inns and suburbs not even a cat or dog remained... Many people, who had been living in their homes for years, and had been attached to their forefathers' houses for generations, perished on the long way.

(Husain 2009: 109-110)



This reference to the atrocities on the people during the mass exodus is also presented by Karnad. But, we see that proper arrangements had been made by the government for the welfare and comfort of the people. Before the shift of the capital, an announcement is made.

The Merciful Sultan Mohammad has ordered—that within the next month every citizen of Delhi must leave for Daulatabad...All arrangements have been made to ensure the comfort of citizens on the way to Daulatabad. All the needs of the citizens, regarding food, clothing or medicine, will be catered to by the state. It is hoped that every citizen will use these amenities to the full and be in Daulatabad as soon as possible.

(55)

Karnad looks at it from a distinct perspective. He observes that the Sultan shifted the capital because Delhi was prone to foreign invaders and its peace was never secure. Besides, Daulatabad was a city of Hindus and as a capital, it will integrate the Hindus and the Muslims. In the play, we see the Sultan making an announcement:

My empire is large now and embraces the south and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and, as you well know, its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of Hindus and as the capital, it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom.

(8)

Tughlaq is kind enough and requests his subjects to come with him. He says to them, “It is only an invitation and not an order” (8). He

wanted the support of his people because he had a desire to “build an empire which will be the envy of the world” (8).

Karnad has presented him a humanist to such an extent that people are allowed to “file a suit against the sultan himself for the misbehaviour of his officers” (8) and he (the King) declares that “No one need have any worry... Justice will be done” (8). Karnad has provided ample evidences from which one comes to understand that when his best intentions are manipulated by his subjects as well as his near ones—Amirs, Syiadis and Ulemas—he turns out a tyrant.

Barani has also accused Tughlaq of killing many innocent Muslims. In this context, Munshi et al (1960: 82) say, “According to Barani, the sultan wantonly shed the blood of innocent Muslims, so much so indeed that a stream of blood was always seen flowing before the threshold of the palace”. Karnad does refer to the killing of Muslims but gives the reasons that they hatched a conspiracy of murder against the Sultan and they tried to kill him during prayer. It is Ratan Sing who thinks of the plan to kill the Sultan during the prayer time. He says, “The muezzin’s call to prayer will be the signal for attack” (44). When Sheikh Sahib asks other Muslims that it is a sin to “kill someone during the prayer” (45), the Amirs answer this by saying that “we can always make up. Do penance for it... Islam will benefit in the long run” (45). Karnad

here satirizes the religiosity of the Muslims who wanted Tughlaq to use his throne for spreading Islam. Imam-Ud-din tells him:

The Arabs spread Islam around the world...They are tired now, limp and exhausted. But their work must continue...You could do it. You are one of most powerful kings on earth today and you could spread the kingdom of heaven on earth. God has given you everything—power, learning and intelligence.

(27)

When his people betrayed his trust by resorting to treacherous deeds, he became ruthless in order to suppress their rebellions. The conspiracy to murder him during prayer upsets Tughlaq so much that he banishes the prayer in his kingdom. He says:

What hopes I had built up when I came to the throne! I had wanted every act in my kingdom to become a prayer, every prayer to become a further step in knowledge, every step to lead us nearer to God. But our prayers too are ridden with disease and must be exiled. There will be no more praying in my kingdom. Anyone caught praying will be severely punished. Hence forth let the moment of prayer walk my streets in silence and leave without a trace.

(53)

Anyone who was found guilty of turning against the Sultan was put behind the bars or was killed. It was only the circumstances that made him a tyrant. We come to know through Barani (a historical character in *Tughlaq*) that “the people have been told that they have a right to criticize the Sultan, to voice their grievances openly” (19).

Tughlaq gets alienated from his society because of his idealistic thoughts which do not match with the mindset of his people. In this context, Shrivastava (2006: 76) says, “He is estranged from the society because he is a man ahead of his age and is not understood by the society around him because his ideas and ideals are far above and very different from an ordinary human being”. His idealism takes him away from his people and his attempt to put every act to the acid test of rationality brings disaster to his reign. His idealism gets reflected through his speech:

I want to climb up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people, ‘come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys. Let’s laugh and cry together and then, let’s pray. Let’s pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air.

(15-16)

The play exposes the paradox of the idealistic king, Tughlaq, who does not have a single moment of peace and rest. He is always suspicious of the motives of the people around him. The imposters, betrayers and treacherous people around him never lent him any real support. The people thought him mad and Amirs termed him tyrannical.

Another action that Sultan takes is the introduction of token currency along with silver dinars. Barani (a historian) explains that this step was taken because the treasury was drained by the Sultan in giving out royal awards. Munshi et al (1960: 71) say, “The contemporary

historian Barani remarks that the Sultan's bounty and munificence had caused great deficiency in the treasury and he wanted large amount of money for his ambitious plan to conquer the whole world". Karnad seems to agree with this step of economic reforms because China and Persia had already introduced paper currency and it worked well there. When Tughlaq is questioned about the introduction of copper currency, he says:

It is a question of confidence. A question of trust! The other day I heard that in China they have paper currency—paper, mind you—and yet it works because the people accept it. They have faith in the emperor's seal on the pieces of paper.

(49)

But, the people like Aziz and Azam took undue advantage of this action taken by Tughlaq and resort to the practice of producing counterfeit coins.

Through the creation of fictional characters, Aziz and Azam, Karnad has shown us how people of Tughlaq's age misused his innovative steps and made him a failure. In the first instance, when Tughlaq introduced his secular idea of providing justice to every one without any privilege to caste, creed and colour, Aziz—a Muslim washer-man by profession—disguises himself as a Brahmin and wins a suit against the Sultan himself, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. In his conversation with Azam, Aziz says:

Look at me. Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world—politics! It's a beautiful world—wealth, success, position, power... When I think of all the tricks I used in our village to pinch a few torn clothes from people—if one uses half that intelligence here, one can get robes of power. And not have to pinch them either—demand them! It is a fantastic world.

(59)

Aziz misuses Tughlaq's idea of impartial justice by taking bribes from poor citizens during a journey from Delhi to Daulatabad. He demands bribe from a mother who wants to take her dying son to a doctor. When Azam tells him that the woman will complain against you, Aziz (disguised as Brahmin) says:

I'm a Brahmin and she won't complain against a Brahmin to a Muslim officer. That will send her straight to hell.

(59)

Karnad has shown us that people like Aziz created problems for people during their journey from Delhi to Daulatabad. When Tughlaq introduced copper currency, both Aziz and Azam became counterfeit coin makers. Aziz tells Azam:

The Sultan is going to introduce copper coins soon. And a copper coin will have the same value as a silver dinar... You are not going to pinch any coins, you are going to make them. Make counterfeit coins... If your fingers are getting restless, use them there.

(59-60)

The play provides an in-depth interpretation of human character and delves out the quest for cultural values. Karnad has not glorified

Tughlaq but has shown us various dimensions of this great personality in order to fill some gaps in the Indian history. Tughlaq was highly ambitious and wanted to be remembered by the future generations as one who made history. Anyone who came in his way was punished severely. When Imam-Ud-Din rose against him and tried to mobilize people against the Sultan, he lays a trap and gets him killed in a battle with Ain-ul-Mulk. As a vigilant and crafty politician, Tughlaq then bewails his death. Barani in the play says:

I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then flagellates himself in remorse.

(35)

Tughlaq is a well-read person in Greek philosophy, logic, literatures and mathematics. He thinks of providing solution to each and every problem. In order to realize his dreams, he begs for support and participation from his people. But his request is turned down by his friends and subjects. He requests his people:

Laugh at me if you like, criticize me, but please don't distrust me. I can order you all to obey me but tell me, how do I gain your full trust? I can only beg for it. (Pleading) I have hopes of building a new future for India and I need your support for that. If you don't understand me, ask me to explain myself and I'll do it. If you don't understand my explanations, bear with me in patience until I can show you the results. But please don't let me down, I beg you. I'll kneel before you if you wish, but please don't let go of my hand.

(49)

Karnad seems to suggest that when there is no positive response from his people, Tughlaq turns away from his sympathetic attitude towards his people and develops strict strategies. The King says:

I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft, I see that now. They will only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should come from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty grave yard of Delhi will satisfy me now.

(53)

Karnad does not use historical facts entirely but takes only parts of them which are useful to him. Tughlaq stands for the administrative reforms, for implementing the policy of Hindu-Muslim unity, recognition of merit irrespective of creed and caste, reorganization of administrative machinery and taxation structure and establishment of an egalitarian society in which all shall enjoy justice, equality and fundamental rights. He does not seem to like the influence of Islam in politics. When he is questioned about the killing of Shihab-Ud-Din and Imam-Ud-Din and going against the tenets of Islam, his answer is:

They tried to indulge in politics—I could not allow that. I have never denied the word of God, Sheikhsahib, because it is my bread and drink. I need it most when the surrounding void pushes itself into my soul and starts putting out every light burning there.

(26)



Karnad has presented Tughlaq as a king who had firm faith in his abilities and a leader who does not want to give up his quest for the welfare of his people. He is presented as a person who experiments with innovative ideas. Tughlaq says:

I have something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history but I have to do it within this life.

(67)

Karnad is not altogether praising Tughlaq. Depiction of his impatience, whimsicality, overconfidence and idealism are also apparent in the play. He wished to fulfill his dreams at any cost. He fails to keep balance between idealism and practicality. He says:

No one can go far on his knees. I have a long way to go. I can't afford to crawl—I have to gallop.

(27)

Karnad also refers to the taxation policy of Tughlaq. He had demanded more taxes from his people. The taxation policy was not altogether the tyranny of the king because he had done a great work for the development of his kingdom. This gets revealed through the speech of Shihab-Ud-Din who says:

He has done a lot of good work. Built schools, roads, hospitals. He had made good use of money.

(40)

The Muslim Ulemas wanted him to “tax the Hindus” (40) because they believed that “the jiziya is sanctioned by the Quran” (40). Karnad traces the political failure of Tughlaq’s reign to a complex ambivalence in the personality and intentions of the leader and to the narrow vision of the people. The play presents the full-blown version of the crisis of leadership and belief that occurs within a culture divided along the lines of majority and minority religions. Tughlaq is a secular humanist who refuses to impose a monolithic order on his people because Greek philosophers have instilled in him a vision of plurality. Tughlaq says:

My kingdom has millions—Muslims, Hindus, Jains. Yes, there is dirt and sickness in my kingdom. But why should I call on God to clean up the dirt deposited by men?.. And my kingdom too is what I am—torn between two pieces by visions whose validity I can’t deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha. I am sorry. But it can’t be done.

(26-27)

Karnad revives the paradoxical Tughlaq of history and occasionally constructs his dialogue verbatim from historical documents, creating a complex ideological and intertextual connection between history, historiography and his own fiction. Indeed, the play intervenes actively in the controversy by presenting an explanatory psychological profile of its enigmatic hero and by thematizing the issues of cultural difference inherent in the historical debate.

At the second level, the play's world bears resemblance to the discourse of modern Indian political and cultural experience. It has a historic theme and contemporary relevance. Karnad (2007: 7) himself acknowledges: "In a sense, the play reflected the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for Independence, and the coming to terms with cynicism and real politik". The play in a way provokes one to look at history through the lens of contemporaneity. The problems that confronted Tughlaq in the fourteenth century still exist in the current Indian political system. Karnad looks at the past from the vantage of present because the past prefigures our present. This fictional representation of past resonates in the present. Walter Benjamin observes, "[E]very image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (Quoted in Dharwadker 2006: 220). It seems that our present gets staged in the past. Tughlaq's tragic tale is symptomatic of the inherited complex problem of the Indian society. It shows that "mere idealism and unrelated understanding of time cannot only help a ruler in reaching the visionary heights" (Nayak 2011: 170). It also seems that the gap of so many centuries have changed nothing. We are actually where we started.

The play evokes certain issues about India's post-Independence socio-political realities. Karnad like Tughlaq is turning to "tradition and history now and seeking an answer there" (48). The play shows us the circumstances when rulers do their politics on the dead people. Shihab-Ud-din is trapped and killed by Tughlaq because he tried to provoke people against the Sultan. After this incident, Tughlaq orders that there was a revolt in the kingdom and Shihab-Ud-din died as a martyr. He says:

Make an announcement that there was a rebellion in the palace and the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer. Say that the Sultan was saved by Shihab-Ud-din who died a martyr's death defending him. The funeral will be held in Delhi and will be a grand affair.

(53)

Barani at this point says, "Oh God! Aren't even dead free from your politics?" (53). It seems an attack on people who use religion as a weapon to achieve their selfish ends. Karnad retrieves the Indian culture by turning away from urban realism which most of the Indian dramatists foreground in their plays.

Karnad takes recourse to the Indian Natak Company tradition which influenced him during his childhood days. He has resorted to the tradition of 'deep' and 'shallow' scenes in this play. In an interview, he says:

I deliberately chose a natak company form for a historical drama. I tried to use the parsi natak stage craft of alternating "deep" and

“shallow” scenes. A “deep” set is about four feet in depth and has a strip in the front for the interspersing scenes of comic exchange. The “shallow” scenes serve as the link scenes of comic exchange while the opulent settings for the “deep” scenes are being prepared.

(Mukherjee 2006: 36)

Karnad has also used the folk drama device of the announcer and the company Natak convention of the comic pair in the characters of Aziz and Azam. In the production of comic pair of Aziz and Azam, he has turned to “the ‘Akara-Makara’ tradition in Kannad drama” (Chaturvedi 2008: 132). It is also a matter of fact that apart from Aziz and Azam, almost all the characters—Imam-Ud-Din, Shihab-Ud-Din, Najib, Tughlaq, Barani and Ain-ul-Mulk—are drawn from the Indian medieval history. The setting of the play is also Indian. Karnad has also recreated the ambiance of pre-modern Islamic Indian culture through costumes, movement, lighting, music, props, scenery and style of dialogue.

One can say that Karnad has re-enacted history to scrutinize the meta-narratives which have given a biased version of Indian history. He has given a revisionary history of Mohammad bin Tughlaq and has filled gaps in Indian historiography. In this way, he has challenged the Eurocentric perspective of India and made it possible for us to view the Indian history from a different perspective. In the fictional re-appraisal of Tughlaq, he has shown us the importance of the past in the present. We see a parallel between our past and post-Independent India.

## Chapter V

### **Cultural Retrieval in *Tale-Danda* and *Bali-The Sacrifice***

In *Tale-Danda*, Karnad has turned to the twelfth century history of Karnataka. He has highlighted a neglected portion of Kannad history. The play projects a socio-religious movement during the time of Kalachurya dynasty. In an interview, Karnad says:

The play is inspired by the life and work of Basavana, a revolutionary poet-saint who lived in the city of Kalyan in Karnataka in the twelfth century. He had got together a remarkable group of poets, reformers, philosophers who created a courageous age of enquiry and social reform unmatched in the history of Karnataka. They opposed caste system, condemned idolatry and temple worship, believed in equality of sexes, believed in the progress of human enterprise. Naturally they attracted the wrath of the orthodox and the conservative people and the entire movement of the Sharanas ended in chaos and terror in 1168.

(Mukherjee 2006: 45)

In this play, Karnad has dealt with the problem of caste barriers and its debilitating effect on the society, particularly in the context of present times. He retrospects the history in its sordid prospect and projects the mystery of caste and religion in the Indian social dynamics. The play is written in the backdrop of the growing fundamentalism and communal frenzy in India. By re-contextualizing the history, he presents an individual's endeavour towards communal integration during the period of violence. Basavana integrated people from different strata of

society and one can see “father against son—brother against brother” (Karnad 2006b: 8) because most of the people have shunned their respective castes and have become Sharanas—devotees of Lord Shiva. We get a peep into a caste- ridden society when a Brahmin woman says to a low caste boy: “This is a Brahmin house. Do you mind standing a little aside so the women of the house can move freely” (9). But she is silenced by a Brahmin boy who has now become a Sharan. He says to her, “My friends will come here when they like and stand where they choose” (9). It is a society where Brahmins “will have the house purified...” (10) because a low caste boy has entered into their house.

The solution to these problems is provided by Basavana and his followers. One of his followers says to Brahmin community, “Are you all listening?... This is my friend Malliboma. He is the son of a tanner. And I am taking him inside our house” (10). Highlighting the class and caste conflicts and a social awakening, Karnad tries to solve India’s quintessential problems. In his preface to this play, Karnad says:

I wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the ‘Mandir’ and the ‘Mandal’ movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by the thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered.

(Quoted in Nayak 2011: 141-142)

Karnad seems to draw our attention towards the fact that parentage, caste and religion are not the right canons to judge a man in a multicultural society like India. Karnad criticizes the caste system where “one’s caste is like the skin on one’s body. You can peel it off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barber—a shepherd—a scavenger” (21)! Karnad shows in the play that the “king Bijjala [was] a barber by caste” (21), but he proved a good king who was idealistic and noble hearted which in turn proves that the kingly qualities are not the qualities of Kshatriyas alone. It is a fact that India has got multi-religious culture and their extremism has always hindered the growth and development of the nation. Karnad wants us to visit the past history and find solutions to the present problems there. Karnad awakens our conscience and makes us feel to “eradicate the caste structure, wipe it off the face of earth. Annihilate the Varna system” (212). He longs for an egalitarian society where people will “sit together, eat together, argue about God together, indifferent to caste, birth or station” (21).

The post-colonial politics in India has increasingly challenged the idea of India as a secular nation (especially since the 1980s) and has tended to deconstruct the nation back into its principal ethno-religious components, represented most strongly by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh fundamentalism. Karnad does not represent the past to assert the unified Hindu identity but he scrutinizes the dominant tradition in the context of a



pluralistic nation. The post-colonial revision can be subsumed within the dialectic of 'satiric' and 'heroic' discourses that has reshaped European and Indian constructs of India since the nineteenth century. Vinay Dharwadker observes that these two modes of representation "have emerged from the mutually transformative encounter between India and the West in the colonial period and continue in the present" (Quoted in Aparna Dharwadker 2006: 172). The satiric and heroic are the broad strategies for praising and denigrating the historical traditions, religious and philosophical systems, social and political institutions, and cultural and civic practices that constitute India as a subject.

Being a Postcolonial writer, Karnad adopts the above-mentioned strategy in order to re-appraise the Indian past. Dharwadker (2006: 172) says:

In postcolonial times, the outsider withdraws from direct political control of the colony and attacks or praises his object from a distance, while the insider increasingly shapes the historical and contemporary understanding of his culture with his heroic self-praise or satiric self criticism.

In *Tale-Danda*, Karnad intends to revive the age-old debate on the caste system. Caste appears in the play as the basis of Hindu socio-religious organization across class division and the play presents the philosophical dialectic of caste as well as the practical consequences of the opposing positions. In the play, some Brahmins do not like Basavana and his followers who have renounced their castes. Sovideva, a staunch

Brahmin says, “I shall bury them alive! Hack them to pieces and feed them to my hounds” (14). The controversy in the play arises when Sharanas tried to arrange an inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin girl—Kalavati—and Sheelavanta—a cobbler boy. For orthodox Hindus, a Hindu is born not made but for Sharanas “physical parentage is of no consequence. A person is born truly only when the guru initiates him into a life of knowledge” (27). The king Bijjala also agrees with the Sharanas because he gives the reason that “in all my sixty-two years, the only people who have looked me in the eye without a reference to my lowly birth lurking deep in their eyes are the Sharanas... They treat me as a human being” (21). Karnad also tries to awaken the contemporary rulers through Basavana who says to king Bijjala, “Kingship is a calling. A source of living yes, but also a duty and a service to the humanity. It is not an inheritance, not a family gift but a right to be earned, to be justified by diligent application” (27). Karnad has shown us the rigidity of both the Brahmins and the Sharanas. When the idea of inter-caste marriage is put before Basavana, he does not initially give his approval to it. He understands that it will not solve any problem but will only bring violence in the society. Basavana says:

This is no time for pretty speeches! It is a question of life and death for these children. From tomorrow the wrath of the bigoted will pursue them like a swarm of snakes, to strike as they pause to put up a roof or light an oven. Who will protect them then? Elementary prudence demands that.

(45-46)

Karnad makes it clear that first we will have to build the platform of fertile ground by changing the mentality of the people and only then such matters (inter-caste marriages etc) can be put to practice. Basavana says:

Until now it was only a matter of theoretical speculation. But this—this is a real. The orthodox will see this mingling of castes as a blow at the very roots of the Varnashrama dharma. Bigotry has not faced such a challenge in two thousand years. I need hardly describe what venom will gush out, what hatred will erupt once the news spreads.

(45)

When Basavana is questioned by his own men for not approving the inter-caste marriage, he says:

Some day this entire edifice of caste and creed, this poison house of Varnashrama will come tumbling down. Every person will see himself only as a human being. As a bhakta. As a sharana. That is inevitable. But we have a long way to go. You know the most terrible crimes have been justified in the name of sanatana religion.

(46)

Karnad does not want us to shed blood in the name of religion or caste. People kill each other to pursue their whims of caste, creed and religious fanaticism. When the father of the bride asks Basavana that he is ready to sacrifice his daughter to forward the cause of great movement, Basavana restrains him from resorting to such kind of things. This gets clear from the discussion below:

Madhuvarasa: Then let me say this: I shall not hesitate to sacrifice my daughter's life to forward the cause of our great movement.

Kakkayya (horrified): Mudhuvarasa!

Basavana: No one has a right to sacrifice any one— not even himself.

Haralayya (to Madhuvarasa): The word 'sacrifice' strikes terror in me. Too long have my people sacrificed our women to the greed of the upper castes, our sons to their cosmic theories of rebirth. No more sacrifices, please.

(46)

Although Karnad dramatizes the twelfth century Kannad history, it is our present—particularly, the demolition of Babri Masjid and Gujarat riots—that get enacted on the stage. When Basavana is informed that Sharanas have occupied a Jain temple and are threatening to smash the naked idols in it and turn it into a Shiva temple, Basavana, as a mouth piece of Karnad, answers:

Violence is wrong, whatever the provocation. To resort to it because someone else started it first is even worse. And to do so in the name of a structure of brick and mortar is a monument to stupidity.

(36)

Karnad cautions us from taking any such harsh step which will lead to bloodshed and death. Although a staunch critique of caste system, Basavana does not favour the inter-caste marriage because he understands that the time is not ripe or favourable for such a big change. He is aware of the ensuing consequences that will prevail after the marriage. The people involved in the marriage (especially Sheelavanta—the

bridegroom—and, Lilita—bride's mother), are not also ready for such a revolution because of various questions that arise before the people. The discussion below makes this clear:

Kakkayya: So, Sheela, what do you say? Is this alliance acceptable to you?

Sheelavanta: I don't want the marriage.

Kakkayya (silences every one): why? Don't you like Kalavati?

Sheelavanta: ayyo, Shiva-Shiva! It's not at all like that. She is—like a flower, I swear. Poor thing.

Kakkayya: ...why are you afraid?

Sheelavanta (tearful): I don't want to hurt her. Don't want to ruin her life. They will tease her tomorrow, call her a 'cobbler's priestess'... Besides—I'm not willing to give up my father's calling. What's wrong with stitching footwear?

Basavana: Is anyone asking you to give up your ancestral calling, Sheelavanta?

Sheelavanta (scared): No, sir, no one. But—Kalavati can't stand the smell of leather. I've seen her. Whenever she passes a cobbler's shop she holds her nose. Will she spend her whole life like that?

Lalita (bursts out): I have been silent all along. I can't be any longer. Sheela is a gem. You won't find another boy like him in all the Brahmin quarters! But what she says is true... It's my child's life. She gets a splitting headache if she so much as smells burning camphor. She is so... so... tender. Each time she returns from the cobbler's street, she throws up and takes to bed.

(46-48)

Therefore, Basavana says, "We are not ready for the kind of revolution this wedding is. We have not worked long enough or hard

enough” (51). Karnad has presented king Bijjala as a pragmatic king who also doesn’t lend his support to this marriage. When Sharanas go ahead in their move to perform this marriage, the orthodox Hindus kill the king Bijjala and bring the families of the couple, pluck out their eyes and give them horrible punishment. We see Gundanna saying:

It’s harrowing! A while ago—the king’s soliders arrested Haralayya and took him to the city square. They also brought Madhuvarasa there—then—as the city watched—they plucked their eyes out—plucked out their eyes with iron rods—bound them hand and foot and had them dragged through the streets—tied to elephants’ legs—Ayyo! How can I tell you?—Torn limbs along the lanes, torn entrails, flesh, bones—They died screaming.

(90)

Karnad has presented the horrible consequences of the religious fanaticism and burden of the caste system. He awakens the people from their deep slumber and makes them sensitive about basic socio-cultural issues of the Indian society. We see that people in Kalyan have “started looting the city. Temples are sacked, trading houses torched. The city reels under gruesome tales of rape, murder and rioting” (100). Though historical in character, the play addresses a contemporary issue of caste consciousness that is still prevalent in our society. It tries to address “issues of religious belief that create social and political crisis” (Mukherjee 2006: 44-45). In an interview, Karnad says, “When people all around us are slaughtered in the name of the temple, I hear echoes from

those times long past” (Quoted in Nayak 2011: 141). Karnad feels disappointed by the evil effects of caste system and says in an interview: “It seems 800 years have solved no problems. We are back exactly where we started” (Karnad 1992: 76). Karnad denounces caste as a social stigma. He is of the view that Indian society is full of rulers like Bijjala, reformers like Basavana and conservatives and radicals like Sovideva, Jagadeva and Damodara. There are still so many people like Damodara who glorify the high castes and traditions superstitiously. The discussion among the characters makes it clear:

Sovideva: The impudent scum! They could have had a quiet wedding in some village. Instead they have to flaunt it here—in the capital.

Indrani: Honestly, it’s beyond me why this little wedding should send the world into hysterics!

Damodara (gently, sadly): Indrani, the Rig Veda tells us that the four varnas flowed out of the Primordial Man: the Brahmin from the head, the Shudra from the feet. So what we have in this wedding is the desecration of the body of that Purusha. How horrifying! What’s worse, the person behind this crime is not an insolent Shudra or a rebellious untouchable—but a Brahmin, endowed with youth, erudition, eloquence and intelligence! What perversity drives him to this sacrilege—this profanity?

Indrani: But the sharanas have done so much for the downtrodden and the destitute. For women like us—

Damodara (incensed): Nature is iniquitous. Struggle, conflict, violence—that’s nature for you. But civilization has been possible because our Vedic heritage controls and directs that self-destructive energy. How large-hearted is our Dharma! To each person it says you don’t have to be anyone but yourself. One’s caste is like one’s home—

meant for one's self and one's family. It is shaped to one's needs, one's comforts and one's traditions. And that is why the Vedic tradition can absorb and accommodate all differences, from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari. And even those said to be its victims have embraced its logic of inequality. Basavana, on the other hand, cannot bear difference. He wants uniformity—and that will fit his prejudices! He loves work, so to be idle is sinful. He abhors violence, so you can't eat meat... He can't grasp the elementary fact that a hierarchy which accommodates difference is more humane than an equality which enforces conformity.

(62-64)

The play depicts a tragedy based on caste and religious conflicts which predict the horror of death for India. Karnad forecasts the horrors of caste that create communal hatred and great havoc in our society and nationalism. He seems to convey a message to his communal and superstitious countrymen and persuades them to relinquish this avenging and revenging tactics, failing which the contemporary society will experience the horrors of twelfth century society of Bijjala's reign. The play is rich in Indian sensibility and tradition and Karnad has made an excellent attempt to foreground the relevance of the past for the present. He is looking at past from the vantage point of present and sees the relevance of past for the present. In the selection of this ideal narrative from the past, he has shown the presentness of the past and as a result of which Indian culture gets enacted on the stage.

In *Bali-The Sacrifice*, Karnad has again revisited the Indian past. He has selected an ancient Jain myth of the thirteen century—Kannad



epic *Yashodhara Charite* by Janna which refers back to a ninth century Sanskrit epic *Yashastilaka* by Somadeva Suri. In this short one-act play, Karnad offers a fresh perspective on rational, social, moral and religious structure of an individual's faith. In an interview, Karnad says:

It deals with the idea that violence is pervasive, lying just beneath the surface of our everyday behavior and is often masked by a conscious effort... It debates the Jain notion that intended violence is as condemnable as the action itself. The mere thought of bloodshed or brutality can condemn one as much as the deed would. The play debates the conflict of faith.

(Mukherjee 2006: 33)

Karnad debates the Indian culture which is full of complexities. In the play, we see Jainism and Hinduism against each other. The play in its social, moral and cultural ramifications presents a great philosophical thinking on the Indian tradition and ideological contents about values, moral conflicts and dilemmas. The play has four characters. Queen has a Jain faith and believes in non-violence. King has renounced Hinduism and accepted Jainism because of its philosophy of non-violence. Queen Mother is an upholder of Hindu tradition and believes in sacrifices. Mahout is a low caste man and looks after king's elephants.

In the play, we see two faiths being practised in one family. This creates havoc in the family and the whole family set-up gets destroyed. The play becomes a site for struggle between personal authority and popular culture of cruelty. In the beginning of the play, we see Queen not

aliening herself with the Rigvedic practice of animal sacrifices. She says to her husband:

All these years I've been pretending that it does not exist. That I couldn't hear the bleat of sheep being taken out at night. For slaughter... You sleep through it. You've grown up with those sounds. I haven't. They wake me up— Keep me awake. But I've pretended I didn't mind.

(Karnad 2006c: 212)

Karnad dramatizes the Rigvedic practice of animal sacrifices where “the animals are graded according to their occasion. Poultry is offered at daily rites. Sheep, goats for more important rituals” (212). The Queen in the play goes for an illicit relationship because she is pressurized by the Queen Mother for not being able to give birth to a child. But this moral debauchery is not committed by the Queen intentionally but unintentionally. In order to avoid frightful consequences of this act, the Queen Mother decides to sacrifice hundred fowls to placate her goddess. Karnad criticizes the violent tradition of the Indian culture through the speech acts of his characters. The following conversation between husband and wife shows this:

King: You know that's been a family tradition.

Queen: Weren't human beings also offered in sacrifice to the goddess once?

King: Yes. But that was generations ago.

Queen: So you see, a tradition can be given up. Or at least changed.

King: Mother will not agree to give up her practices. You know that. She feels she owes it to our ancestors. We've been through all this before.

Queen: But now it concerns our child. What offerings will be considered worthy of a royal birth, do you think? They say when you were born, every inch of the earth miles around was soaked in blood.

King: People exaggerate.

Queen: Yes, you are right. I shouldn't not be complaining about the scale. Just the thought. Of bloodshed. Even a single drop of blood. I don't want it. Not in the name of our child.

(212-213)

Karnad wants us to understand and think over the dynamics of Indian socio-religious culture “where the spirit of religion is often relegated and rituals are highlighted in individuals belief in superstition and personal ego” (Nayak 2011: 74). Queen Mother as a symbol of past tradition feels as if she owes it to her ancestors. Queen does not accept the tradition of sacrifices especially on the birth of his child. She says:

We are Jains, our son will be a Jain. He will have to uphold the principle of compassion for all living beings, of non-violence. Should we allow a blood rite to mark his arrival? It would be wrong... Terribly wrong!

(213)

If the child can be taken as a symbol of Indian future, then Karnad definitely does not want violent rites to prevail in the days to come. However, in a multicultural and multi-religious country like India, it is a hard and vibrant issue to negotiate between violence and non-violence.

Queen Mother wants to take forward the violent tradition and says, “You are denying me the right to my worship” (214). Karnad represents the dilemma of the King who is caught in the crossfire between two religions. Though brought up as a Kshatriya, the King has converted to Jainism on humanitarian grounds. The reasons given by the King can be understood from this conversation:

Mother: You’re treating my goddess as though she were a cheap, tribal spirit. And you are cutting off my path to her.

King: Try and be sensible, Mother. No one is stopping you from worshipping your goddess or from your own form of worship. But I am a Jain—a Jain King. I cannot have his birth greeted with the infliction of death.

Mother: You were not born a Jain. You were born my son. But you betrayed me and my faith. Instead of choosing the woman and bringing her to your faith, you chose hers.

King: I accepted the faith because I found truth in it and compassion for the world in pain. I don’t want to add to the pain. I will not let anyone do it. Certainly not in the name of my son.

(214)

In the circumstances of this rivalry between the two religions, the King persuades both the Queen and the Queen Mother for the sacrifice of cock made of dough. The Queen does not want to interfere in the Queen Mother’s belief in the sacrifices. She says, “I don’t want to hurt her. She can live by her beliefs...” (213). The Queen Mother also does not budge away from her belief and makes clear that: “I shall live away from the palace, in a corner of my own. And there, I shall live as I please. With my

gods. My sacrificial animals. No further interference from you two” (215). The Mahout performs the role of a catalyst and relieves the Queen from various stresses. He warns the Queen and the King of the consequences of sacrificing the cock of dough. He says to them, “Stop playing with these things, these forces... These things can eat into you” (238). The husband and wife do not listen to Mahout’s call. They go ahead in their act to perform the sacrifice. When the King plunges sword into the cock of dough, the cock begins to crow. The Queen at last looks at the King in hatred and she “presses the point of blade on her womb and impales herself on the sword” (240). Therefore, the violence in thought has lead to the violence in action. In an interview, Karnad says:

The mahout is the catalyst who releases the repressions of the different characters in the play, especially the Queen... She is seduced by his music and in forgetting all inhibitions and barriers of decorum, commits adultery in thought even before their physical union. Likewise she is shocked to realize that, not necessarily through explicit behavior, one can be violent in intent or thought.

(Mukherjee 2006: 50)

Karnad discusses the violence that is perpetuated in the name of religion or faith. He has beautifully portrayed the Indian culture with its negative and positive aspects. He has used the context of the play for “integrating religious communities, sects and beliefs for nation building” (Nayak 2011: 74). It is evident from the King’s statement: “There will be no bloodshed. We’ll compromise” (225). Even when Queen Mother and

Queen compromise for the sacrifice of cock of dough, it costs Queen's life. It implies that violence in thought is as condemnable as the violence in action.

Karnad wants to free the nation from religious fanaticism which creates hatred and dissensions in human relationships. He has not provided any solution in the play. As mentioned in the second chapter, Karnad was influenced by Brecht's 'alienation effect' where audiences are expected to come to their own understanding of the situation. So, like Brecht, Karnad debates the issue of conflict in faith between violence and non-violence and leaves it to the audience to come to their own understanding. It gets clear from Karnad's preface to this play where he praises the "astuteness and sensitivity of Mahatma Gandhi who saw... clearly the importance of non-violence to the cultural and political survival of India" (Quoted in Roy 2006: 283). Karnad wants us to shun the notions of violence. Karnad retrieves India's conflicting religious and cultural ethos, and has successfully debated various issues before us.

Karnad has also retrieved the Indian folk theatre culture by employing various songs in this play which reveal the inner psyche of the characters. In the beginning of the play, King is alone on the outer steps of the temple while his wife is making love with Mahout. His state of mind is reflected by the song that he sings:

So we begin our tale—

and in any tale  
the King and the Queen  
sitting on the throne  
should merge into one—  
she on his lap  
become half his royal frame  
or entwined in bed, tangled together  
they must turn  
into a four-armed deity  
thrashing and moaning  
for the good of the land.

But  
woe betide the times  
where the King sits alone  
outside on the steps  
racked by sighs  
while the Queen is trapped  
in her lover's thighs.

(190)

The first song in which the “world is divided in to two orbs” (189) reflects the cultural war/antagonism between Queen Mother and her daughter-in-law in terms of their faith. The play opens with a song sung by Queen. She sings:

As the world is divided  
into two orbs:  
one lit up by the sun

the other hid in the shade,  
so also the human soul,  
the habitation of gods,  
is split into two realms—  
one of the spirits that adore  
the blood and gore  
of the bright, shining blade  
slicing smoothly  
through the lamb  
and the other  
ruled by the spirits that bid  
you pause  
before you use  
the knife on a sapling  
or clap in the air—  
lest you harm a life.

(189)

These songs provide commentary on the problems and enhance the understanding of the audience.

It won't be wrong to suggest that in *Bali: The Sacrifice*, Karnad “negotiates between the culture and need based ideology in their functional relevance and philosophical thinking” (Nayak 2011: 80). The moral choices that “the King has to make in this play reflect the choices before contemporary Indians” (Rajeswaran 2005: 141).



In conclusion, one can say that in the select plays, Karnad has beautifully painted the picture of the Indian culture in all its colours. Karnad has used the historical source of twelfth century in *Tale-Danda*. He has denigrated caste system in India and the problems associated with it. He sees it as a stigma on the face of India. In this play, we are introduced to a caste ridden society where high caste people want to retain their caste superiority. When an inter-caste marriage is performed, the society is turned into ashes. This extremism in religion has always led to violence and bloodshed. The same religious conflict is seen in *Bali-The Sacrifice*. We see the conflict between Jainism and Hinduism. The characters go through mental tortures as they want to align themselves with their respective faiths. At last, Queen has to pay the price of her life because she has betrayed her non-violent faith in sacrificing a cock of dough.

Karnad's interrogative spirit does not leave any belief or practice unchallenged. He questions all kinds of superstitious beliefs and practices. Through his plays, he has presented the diversity of Indian culture. In a diverse society like India, a need-based ideology is required which will cater to all sections of the society. He wants us to shun violent acts where rituals are given preference and the spirit of religion is often relegated to a marginal position.

## **Conclusion**

An in-depth study of Karnad's select plays reveals that he has contributed a lot to the IED, a genre still in its infancy. His creative imagination is Indian which is based on the rich, varied Indian tradition and his use of the rich plethora of Indian myths, folk elements and history. He visits past to analyze life and society, brilliant individual characters and their policies, political strategies, secular ideologies and biggest failures.

In my Chapter I entitled, "European Drama: A Historical Perspective", an attempt has been made to trace the history of Drama from Greek to present times through a discussion on some eminent dramatists. It has been shown how Drama originated as a form of low entertainment and developed into a genre of world recognition. It reflects how initially it emerged from ritualized singing and dancing and with the passage of time encapsulated issues of social, political, historical and cultural importance.

In my Chapter II entitled, "Evolution of Indian English Drama: An Overview", an attempt has been made to trace the genesis and development of IED through a discussion on almost all dramatists of this genre. The hindrances in its development and influences from the Western world have been also discussed in detail. It has got fresh vitality because of the ability of dramatists to draw the sources of their plays

from Indian past. They have used Indian myths, folklores and history as we have already seen.

In Chapter III entitled, “Girish Karnad as a Dramatist”, Karnad’s contribution to Indian English Drama has been discussed in detail. Through his lifelong service and devotion to this field, he has enlivened and contributed a lot to this genre as has been already discussed.

In Chapter IV entitled, “*Tughlaq*: Re-enacting”, an attempt has been made to show how Karnad has provided a revisionary history of Indian historiography. He has mixed fact and fiction to provide another version of Mohammed bin Tughlaq which stands in a determinable ideological relationship to the received and accepted versions.

In Chapter V entitled, “Cultural Retrieval in *Tale-Danda* and *Bali-The Sacrifice*”, the select plays have been discussed in terms of cultural retrieval. Karnad has used historical and mythological source to retrieve and give a panoramic picture of Indian culture.

In *Tughlaq*, Karnad has offered a serious fictional reappraisal of a figure ridiculed in history as well as popular lore which is a strategy of Postcolonial counter discourse. In Postcolonial theory, we see a challenge against grand narratives whose ideological implications have been scrutinized. The Colonial power is justified and maintained not only in terms of power based on technological superiority and military might but also through the ‘soft’ power of ideology. The efficacy of this power lies

in what Ngugi wa Thiongo calls 'colonizing the mind' so that both colonizer and colonized think of the assumptions encoded in Orientalism as natural, inevitable and uncontested. From Postcolonial perspective, Karnad has presented Tughlaq in such a manner that evokes sympathy from audience. In the play, Tughlaq is presented as a secular humanist who tried to rule over his people impartially and tried to lay foundation of such a kingdom where justice would work without any preference to religion, caste, creed and colour as we already know. Karnad scrutinizes the 'official' as well as the Orientalist narratives of history which have given a biased version of Indian history. He has given alternative revisionary history of Mohammed bin Tughlaq than the one given by Orientalist or his contemporary historians on the basis of which they have tried to either legitimize their British imperialism in India or ridiculed him as a mad Tughlaq as has been already discussed. He is looking at past from the vantage point of present and is trying to make us understand the relevance of the past for the present. The play also invokes significant elements in modern Indian political and cultural experience that contemporary audience can apply to their own situations. Karnad also presents a full-blown version of the crisis of leadership and belief that occurs within a culture divided along various religions and sects. As Dharwadker (2006: ix) rightly says, "Karnad's plays employ the narratives of myth, history and folklore to evoke an ancient or pre-

modern world that resonate in contemporary contexts because of his uncanny ability to remake the past in the image of the present”.

In *Tale-Danda* also Karnad retrieves and makes current the twelfth century historical period of Karnataka. With a reformistic zeal, Karnad tries to awaken Indian people against the violence that is being perpetuated in the name of religion or caste system. The same message is given in his another play— *Bali-The Sacrifice*. He makes us visit the past and expects us to learn lessons from it because the Indian past has got the vitality to make us understand our present. Indian culture seems to have exerted great influence on his artistic sensibilities and this enables him to frame his plays keeping in view all the ramifications of India’s multi-cultural society. His depiction of violence in post-colonial India can be appreciated only by understanding the in-depth message of his plays. He makes us understand the reasons and the effects of the violence and brings the message of peace home. The crisis in *Tughlaq* as well as *Tale-Danda* reflects the crisis of post-Independent India whether it be the desecration of Golden Temple in Amritsar, introduction of emergency in 1967 or Mandir-Mandal commissions, demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodia or the emergence of Sikh, Hindu or Muslim fundamentalism. In order to transmit his message, he resorts to the enactment of the Indian pre-colonial past with which the whole nation gets enacted on the stage. Through the select plays, he has not only raised the issues of majority-

minority religions but has also given vent to intra-religious problems like caste system. He wants people to shun the caste barriers and work collectively for the betterment of Indian nation. Although he delineates the issues of both inter-religious and intra-religious problems, he advocates a non-violent and need based ideology without giving privilege to any one of them. He is of the view that there is a need to learn lessons from the past as our past prefigures our present and myths resonate in modern experience.

He has also retrieved the Indian culture by going back to the Indian Natak and Parsi theatre traditions which he himself acknowledges. The use of masks, songs incorporates his plays with Indian tradition and culture. His plays show Indianess in terms of their locations, dialogues and characterization. We encounter in him a playwright who “as a true culture smith intends to awaken the contemporary intelligentsia from cultural amnesia” (Tripathi 2004: 8). As a Postcolonial writer, Karnad evinces an uncanny ability to remake the past within contemporary vision. He holds up a mirror to the present incorporating elements from the past. Like African writers who use myths and legends to comment on their contemporary situations, Karnad has done a commendable job in dealing with the issues that need to be addressed for the betterment of this country. In all the three plays, Indian past is an important factor or has the central place around which the whole argument revolves.

As Karnad was influenced by Brecht's 'alienation effect' and 'Epic Theatre', he does not give a conclusion in his plays. He just debates the issues and leaves it to the audience to come to their own understanding of the plays. Karnad has rejected the imitative pursuit of the West and ventured into his own indigenous territory for themes and performance techniques. He is in search of roots and has taken to stylization which has been the chief character to traditional Indian theatre for two thousand years.

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